Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/writingsmusset07mussiala

THE WRITINGS OF

ALFRED DE MUSSET

COMPLETE IN TEN VOLUMES

THE COMPLETE WRITINGS

of

ALFRED DE MUSSET

NEW YORK
EDWIN C. HILL COMPANY
1905

One Thousand Copies have been printed on Large Paper. The first One Hundred and Fifty sets in Levant Binding, Extra Illustrated; the remaining Eight Hundred and Fifty in Buckram.

This is Copy No. 68

SHORT STORIES OF
ALFRED DE MUSSET

CROISILLES · PIERRE AND CAMILLE
THE SECRET OF JAVOTTE
THE BEAUTY SPOT
THE WHITE BLACKBIRD · THE GRISETTE

DONE INTO ENGLISH BY

M. RAOUL PELLISSIER

"Monsieur, my father has just failed in business."

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

M. BIDA · HENRI PILLE · F. FLAMENG

VOLUME SEVEN

PRINTED FOR SUBSCRIBERS ONLY BY
EDWIN C. HILL COMPANY
1905

"Monsieur, my father has just failed in business."

SHORT STORIES OF
ALFRED DE MUSSET

CROISILLES · PIERRE AND CAMILLE
THE SECRET OF JAVOTTE
THE BEAUTY SPOT
THE WHITE BLACKBIRD · THE GRISETTE

DONE INTO ENGLISH BY
M. RAOUL PELLISSIER

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
M. BIDA · HENRI PILLE · F. FLAMENG

VOLUME SEVEN

PRINTED FOR SUBSCRIBERS ONLY BY
EDWIN C. HILL COMPANY
1905

Copyright, 1905, by
EDWIN C. HILL COMPANY

EDWIN PRESS

URL
PQ
2369
A2
1905
v.7

CROISILLES

I

At the beginning of the reign of Louis XV, a young man named Croisilles, the son of a goldsmith, was returning from Paris to Havre, his native town. He had been entrusted by his father with the settlement of a business affair, and he had brought it to a happy termination. The joy of bearing good news led him to pursue his way more merrily and, perhaps, more slowly than usual; for although he had a considerable sum of money in his pocket, he traveled on foot for the pleasure of it. He was a good-tempered fellow and one who did not lack intelligence, although he was at times so heedless and absent-minded that he passed for somewhat of a fool. His waistcoat buttoned awry, his periwig flying at the mercy of the wind, his hat under his arm, he followed the bank of the Seine, now dreaming, now singing, up at daybreak, dining at the inns along the route, and charmed with his journey through one of the most beautiful regions of France. While pilfering the apple-orchards along the road, he was turning sundry

rhymes over and over in his head (for every rattle-brained youth is something of a poet), and he tried to compose a madrigal for a certain beautiful young damsel in Havre. This young damsel was no less than the daughter of a farmer-general, Mademoiselle Godeau, the pearl of Havre, a rich heiress with many suitors. Croisilles had never entered the Godeau mansion except on business; he had once delivered there some jewelry purchased at his father's shop. M. Godeau, whose comparatively vulgar surname ill-fitted his immense fortune, avenged by his arrogance the wrong done him by fate, and showed himself on all occasions enormously and pitilessly rich. He was not the man to allow in his drawing-room the son of a goldsmith; but as Mademoiselle Godeau had the most beautiful eyes in the world, as Croisilles was not unfavored, and as there is nothing to hinder a handsome youth from falling in love with a pretty girl, Croisilles adored Mademoiselle Godeau, who did not appear to be displeased. Thus he was thinking of her while making his way along the road to Havre, and, as he was not in the habit of indulging in prudent forethought, instead of reflecting on the barriers which separated him from his beloved, he stupidly abandoned himself to the pleasure of seeking a rhyme for her Christian name. Mademoiselle Godeau was called Julie, and the rhyme was easily found. When

Croisilles reached Honfleur he embarked with a satisfied heart, his money and his madrigal in his pocket, and, as soon as the boat landed at Havre he hastened to the paternal abode.

He found the shop closed; he knocked several times, not without astonishment and apprehension, for it was not a holiday, but no one answered. He called his father's name, but in vain. He went to a neighbor to inquire what had happened; instead of answering, the neighbor turned aside as though not wishing to recognize him. Croisilles repeated his questions; he learned that his father, having been embarrassed for some time, had finally become bankrupt, and had fled to America, abandoning to his creditors all that he possessed. Not fully realizing his misfortune, Croisilles was at once overwhelmed with the thought that he would never see his father again. It seemed to him incredible that he should be thus suddenly abandoned; he tried to force his way into the store, but he was warned that the official seal had been placed on the door. He sat down on the step and gave way to his grief, weeping piteously, deaf to the consolation offered by those around him, calling again and again upon his father, although he knew he was far away; at last he rose, ashamed to see a crowd gathering around him, and in deep despair he made his way toward the harbor.

On reaching the pier he cast about him the

wild look of a man who does not know where he is going, or what will become of him. He felt that he was lost, that he was penniless, having no asylum to which he could flee, no means of support, and, it is needless to say, no friends left. Alone, wandering on the pier, he was tempted to throw himself into the sea. Just at the moment when he was yielding to that rash impulse, there advanced toward him from the other side of the pier an old servant named Jean, who had served his father many years.

"Ah! my poor Jean," he cried, "you know what has happened during my absence. Is it possible that my father has gone away without a word of warning?"

"He has gone," said Jean, "but not without bidding you good-by."

At the same time he drew from his pocket a letter which he gave to his young master. Croisilles recognized his father's writing, and before opening the letter, he kissed it with transports of joy; but the letter contained only a few words. Instead of feeling his grief assuaged, the young man found his fears confirmed. Honest up to that time, ruined by a misfortune which he could not foresee (the failure of an associate), the old goldsmith had left his son nothing but some few words of consolation and no hope, except that vague hope which is born of despair.

"Jean, my friend," said Croisilles, after read-

ing the letter, " you have taken care of me when a child, and you are certainly the only friend I have left; that is fortunate for me, but it may be embarrassing for you, for as sure as my father sailed from this spot, I am going to throw myself into the sea, not at this moment, in your presence, but some day or other, for I am lost."

" What is that you are going to do? " inquired Jean, pretending that he did not understand, but at the same time grasping Croisilles by the coat; " what is my dear master thinking of? Your father made a mistake; he was anticipating money which never came, and that is no little matter. Could he remain here? I have for thirty years seen him accumulating money; I have seen him working and planning while the money was coming in little by little. He was an honest man and skilful, and he has been cruelly wronged. During the last days I was at his side, and I saw the money going out as fast as it came in. Your father paid in one day all he could, and when his strong box was empty, he said to me, pointing to the bottom where there remained but six francs: ' There were one hundred thousand francs in that box this morning! ' There is nothing dishonorable about such a failure! "

" I do not doubt my father's integrity," replied Croisilles, " any more than I do his affection for me, but I wish I could have embraced

him, for I do not know what is to become of me. I am not accustomed to poverty, and I have not the ability to make my own fortune. And even if I had, my father is gone. If it took him thirty years to enrich himself, how long would it take me to repair his misfortune? Much longer. And will he be alive then? Certainly not; he will die far way and I shall never see him again; I can only rejoin him by dying myself."

Torn with grief as he was, Croisilles did not forget his religion. Although despair led him to desire death, his religion bade him pause. After a few words with Jean, he gave the old servant his arm, and together they walked back to the town. When they had entered its streets, and the sea was left some distance in the rear, Jean continued:

"It seems to me that a man of fortune has the right to live, and that misfortune proves nothing. Since your father, God be praised, has not killed himself, why should you think of dying? Since no dishonor attaches to you, as every one knows, what would be thought of you if you should take such a rash step? That you were so weak that you could not endure poverty. You would prove yourself neither man nor a Christian; for, in truth, what is it that frightens you? There are people who are born poor and who have neither father nor mother. I know

that we are not all alike, but I know that with God nothing is impossible. Your father was not born rich, and it is perhaps that thought that now consoles him. If you had been here during the last month it would have given you more courage. Yes, any one may be ruined, no one is entirely secure from bankruptcy; but I make so bold as to say that your father was a man in spite of the fact that he went away so hastily. But what was he to do? Vessels do not sail for America every day. I accompanied him to the dock, and you should have seen how sad he was! How he charged me to take care of you and give you news of him! You must put away all idea of throwing yourself into the sea. Every one has his time of trial in this world, and I was a soldier before I became a servant. I have suffered many hardships, but I was young; I was your age then, and it seemed to me that Providence could not say its last word to a man of twenty-five. Why would you prevent the good God from repairing the misfortune which has befallen you? Be patient and all will come out right. If you will accept advice, I would say, wait two or three years and all will be well. There are many ways of getting on in this world. Why should you stake everything on one unlucky turn of the cards?"

While Jean was thus striving to persuade his master, Croisilles walked alone in silence, and,

after the manner of those who suffer, he looked about him on one side and the other, as though seeking for something that would serve to bind him to life. As chance willed it, Mademoiselle Godeau, the daughter of the farmer-general, passed with her governess. Her home was not far distant. Croisilles saw her enter. That meeting produced on him more effect than all the reasoning in the world. I have already said that he was somewhat erratic, and that he nearly always yielded to his first impulse. Without a moment's hesitation, and without a word of explanation, he dropped the old servant's arm and turned aside to knock at M. Godeau's door.

II

When we attempt in the present day to represent what was formerly known as a financier, we imagine an enormous paunch, short legs, an immense wig, a large face with a triple chin; and there is reason for thus picturing such a personage. Every one knows what great abuses grew out of the tax-farming system, and it seems as though there must be natural law which makes fatter than other men those who fatten not only on their own laziness, but on the toil of others. Among financiers, M. Godeau was as classic as could be found anywhere, that is

to say, one of the fattest; at this time he had the gout; a complaint which was as fashionable then as is the headache to-day. Stretched out in an easy chair, his eyes half closed, he was nursing his swollen feet. The glass mirrors which surrounded him majestically repeated the various parts of his enormous person; bags filled with gold covered the table; all about him costly furnishings, gilded canopies, doors, locks, the chimney-piece, the ceilings, everything gilded, even his coat; I do not know but that his brain was also gilded. He was estimating the returns on a little affair which he was confident would bring in some thousands of louis; he was smiling over the prospect when Croisilles was announced and entered the room with a humble but resolute air and a general appearance of disorder, such as one might expect to find in a man who thinks seriously of drowning himself. Godeau was just a little surprised at this unexpected visit; he thought his daughter had made some purchases; he was confirmed in that belief when he saw his daughter appear at almost the same moment. He made a sign to Croisilles, not to be seated, but to speak. The daughter seated herself on a sofa, and Croisilles, standing before M. Godeau, began to unburden himself something after this manner:

" Monsieur, my father has just failed in business. The bankruptcy of a business associate

forced him to suspend payment, and unable to witness his own shame, he has fled to America, after turning over to his creditors his last sou. I was out of the city when this happened; I have just returned and learned of this sad event but two hours ago. I am absolutely without resources and I have decided to die. Upon leaving this house I shall probably drown myself. I would have done so before this if I had not chanced to meet mademoiselle, your daughter, in the street. I love her with all my heart; for two years I have loved her, and I have been silent up to this moment on account of the respect I feel for her; but to-day, in declaring my love, I discharge a sacred duty, and I believe I would offend God if, before putting an end to my life, I did not come to you and ask your permission to marry Mademoiselle Julie. I have not the slightest hope that you will grant my request, but I am, nevertheless, impelled to make it, for I am a good Christian, and when a good Christian reaches a point where life is no longer possible, he ought, at least, by way of extenuating his crime, exhaust every means of delaying the fatal moment."

At the beginning of this discourse M. Godeau supposed that he was to be asked to make a loan and he had prudently thrown his handkerchief over his money-bags, preparing in advance to give a polite refusal, for he had always thought

well of Croisilles's father. But when he heard the youth through, and realized the nature of his request, he was satisfied that the poor boy had become mad. At first he thought of ringing for a servant and having him put out of the house; but when he observed the firmness of the youth and the look of sincerity on his face, he could not help pitying the victim of such a mild form of insanity. He contented himself with ordering his daughter to retire, so that she might not hear any more such improprieties.

While Croisilles was speaking, Mademoiselle Godeau had colored as red as a peach in the month of August. In obedience to her father's request she retired. The young man made a profound bow, which she did not appear to notice. Alone with Croisilles, M. Godeau eyed him from head to foot, stood up, then fell back on his cushions, trying to assume a paternal air.

" My boy," said he, " I sincerely hope that you are not joking with me, but that you have really lost your senses. Not only do I excuse this proceeding, but I promise not to punish you for it. I am very sorry your poor devil of a father has become bankrupt and that he has decamped—it is indeed very sad, and I can readily understand how it has turned your head. I wish to do something for you; take a chair and be seated."

" It is useless," replied Croisilles; " the mo-

ment you refuse me I shall take final leave of you. I wish you every kind of good fortune."

"And where are you going?"

"To write to my father and bid him good-by."

"What the devil! Why, any one would swear you were telling the truth. You intend to drown yourself; what the devil do I care?"

"Yes, sir; at least I think so, if courage does not fail me."

"A fine thing to do! Fie on you! Sit down, I tell you, and listen to me."

M. Godeau had just made a sensible reflection to the effect that it was never agreeable to have it said that any man, whoever he might be, had gone out and drowned himself immediately upon leaving your house. He again eyed the young man before him, took out his snuff-box, cast a careless glance at his frilled shirt-front, and continued:

"You are a stupid fellow, a knave, a baby; you do not know what you are talking about. You are ruined—that is your own affair. But, my dear friend, that is not sufficient to excuse such a deed; you must reflect before taking such a step. If you come to ask me for good advice, for instance, why, that is all right. But what is it you want? You are in love with my daughter?"

"Yes, sir, and I repeat that I am very far from supposing that you will consent to give

her to me in marriage; but as that is the only thing on earth that could save me from death, if you believe in God, as I suppose you do, you will understand why I come to you."

"Whether I believe in God or not does not concern you, and I will not permit you to question me in that way; answer me first: where have you seen my daughter?"

"In my father's shop, and in this house when I delivered the jewels for Mademoiselle Julie."

"Who told you her name was Julie? God pardon me, but you seem to have forgotten where you are! But whether her name is Julie or Javotte, do you know what he must have who would aspire to the hand of the daughter of a farmer-general?"

"No, I am sure I do not, unless it be wealth equal to hers."

"He must have something more, my fine fellow, he must have a name."

"Very well! my name is Croisilles."

"Your name is Croisilles, poor wretch! And is Croisilles a name?"

"In faith, upon my soul and conscience, it is as good a name as Godeau."

"You are impertinent and you shall answer for it."

"Indeed, sir, do not be angry, I have not the slightest inclination to offend you. If you see anything in what I have said which offends

you, and if you wish to punish me, you have only to become angry; upon leaving this house I shall drown myself."

Although M. Godeau had promised himself that he would send Croisilles away as gently as possible, in order to avoid all danger of scandal, his prudence was not equal to the impatience inspired by offended pride; the interview to which he was trying to resign himself seemed monstrous in itself; I leave you to imagine what he thought while delivering himself of the following words:

"Listen," said he, almost beside himself, and resolved to put an end to the matter at any cost, "you are not such a fool that you can not understand a word of common sense. Are you rich? No. Are you noble? Still less. What frenzy has induced you to come to me? You have come here to pester me. You think you can make something by a bold stroke; you know very well that it is useless. You hope to make me responsible for your death. Can you justly complain of anything I have done? Do I owe your father a sou? Is it my fault that you have come to this? Very well, go drown yourself, and leave me in peace."

"That is just what I am going to do; I am your very humble servant."

"One moment! It shall not be said that you applied to me for assistance in vain. Here, my

boy, are some coins; get a good dinner and let me hear no more about you."

"Many thanks; but I am not hungry and have no use for your money!"

Croisilles left the room, and the financier, having eased his conscience by the offer he had just made, settled comfortably in his cushioned chair and resumed his meditations.

Mademoiselle Godeau, during all this time, had not been so far away as one might suppose; she had, it is true, left the room in obedience to her father's command; but instead of retiring to her own room, she stood near the door and listened. If Croisilles's extravagant course had astonished her, it had not, at least, offended her, for love, since the beginning of the world, has never passed for offense; on the other hand, as there could be no doubt about the young man's despair, Mademoiselle Godeau experienced the two sentiments which are most dangerous for women: pity and curiosity. When she saw that the interview was at an end and that Croisilles was about to leave, she hastily crossed the room where she had been stationed, not caring to be caught in the act of eavesdropping; but she suddenly stopped and retraced her steps. The thought that Croisilles was really going to kill himself troubled her heart. Without reflecting on her course she advanced to meet him; the room was quite large and the two young people

slowly approached each other. Croisilles was as pale as death, and Mademoiselle Godeau sought in vain for words which would express her feelings. While passing near him she allowed a bunch of violets to drop from her hand. He at once stooped, picked up the flowers, and offered them to her; but instead of accepting them, she continued on her way without a word, and entered her father's room. Croisilles placed the flowers on his breast and left the house with throbbing heart, not knowing what to make of that adventure.

III

Scarcely had he reached the street before he saw the faithful Jean running toward him, his face beaming with joy.

"What has happened?" he asked; "have you some news for me?"

"Yes," replied Jean, "I have to inform you that the seals have been broken and that you can return to your own house. All of your father's debts having been paid, you are now the owner of the house. It is true that they have carried off all the money and valuables, even the furniture; but the house remains, and you have not lost everything. I have been looking for you everywhere for an hour, and did not know what had become of you, and I hope, my

dear master, you will be wise and pursue a reasonable course."

"What would you advise me to do?"

"Sell your house, for that is your fortune. It is worth thirty thousand francs. With that sum you need not die of starvation, and what is to prevent you from buying some goods and engaging in business, which I am sure would prosper."

"We shall see," replied Croisilles, continuing on his way down the street. He was anxious to return to his father's house, but when he arrived, the sight that met his eyes left him with scarcely the courage to enter. The shop was in disorder, the rooms deserted, his father's sleeping room empty, everywhere was barren and desolate. There was not even a chair left; all the drawers had been rifled, the counter broken, the strong box carried away; nothing had escaped the greedy eyes of the creditors and bailiffs, who, after having pillaged the house, took their departure, leaving the doors open as though to testify to the passers-by the thoroughness of their work.

"Behold," cried Croisilles, "behold all that remains of thirty years of toil and honest effort, because on a certain day at a particular hour there was not quite enough to honor a signature imprudently given!"

While the young man was wandering sadly through the house, a prey to bitter reflections,

Jean appeared to be much embarrassed. He supposed his master had no money, that he had not even dined. He was trying to think of some pretext to question him on the subject and, if necessary, offer him a part of his savings. After torturing his mind in a vain effort to decide on some plan, he could think of nothing better than to approach Croisilles and tenderly inquire:

"Do you like partridges with cabbage?"

The poor fellow pronounced these words in a tone at once so comical and so pathetic, that Croisilles, in spite of his sorrow, could not refrain from laughing.

"And why do you ask, Jean?"

"I ask because my wife is going to cook some for dinner and if . . ."

Up to the present moment Croisilles had entirely forgotten the sum of money he had collected for his father in Paris; Jean's proposition reminded him that his pockets were full of gold.

"I thank you with all my heart," said he to the old man, "and I accept with pleasure; but if you are anxious about the state of my finances, let me assure you that I have more than enough to buy a good supper this evening, which you shall share with me."

With these words, he laid on the mantel four well-filled purses which contained fifty louis each.

"Although this money does not belong to me,"

he added, "I can use it for two or three days. Can you tell me how to address it so that it will reach my father?"

Jean hastened to reply, "Your father instructed me to tell you that the money belongs to you, and I have not mentioned the matter before, because I did not know what success you had met with in Paris. Your father will lack nothing in this life; he will be taken care of by one of his correspondents in America; moreover, he took away with him enough to satisfy his needs, knowing that there was more than enough here to meet his just debts, and whatever is left over and above, belongs to you; I was expressly charged to tell you this. This gold is as honestly yours as the house in which we stand. I can even recall your father's words on this subject: 'Tell my son to forgive me for leaving him; tell him not to forget me, but to use all that is left after my debts are paid, as though it were my fortune bequeathed to him.' Those were his own words, so put that in your pocket; and since you think well of my dinner, let us go and make sure of it."

The joy and sincerity which shone in Jean's eyes left Croisilles no room for doubt. His father's words had affected him so deeply that he could not restrain his tears; on the other hand, four thousand francs were not such a bagatelle under the circumstances. And then the house

could not be counted upon as an immediate asset, for it must be sold, and that was sometimes a long and difficult process. All that could not fail to bring about a considerable change in the young man's condition; all thoughts of self-destruction were lost in a feeling of gratitude and he was at the same time conscious of increased sadness, although less desolate. After having closed the shutters and locked the door, he left the place with Jean, and, while crossing the city once more, he could not help thinking how strange it is that our affections enable us to experience unexpected joy in the feeblest gleam of hope. With that thought in his mind, he sat down to dinner with his old servant, who did all he could to cheer his master during the humble meal.

The heedless have one happy fault; they are easily grieved, and at the same time easily consoled. It would be a mistake to consider them either insensible or selfish; their sensations are perhaps more intense than those of others, and they are quite capable of blowing their brains out in a moment of despair; but when that moment has passed, if they still live, they feel the necessity of eating and drinking as usual. Joy and sorrow do not glide over them; they pass through their hearts like a flash; sincere and passionate natures which know suffering but which know no falsehood, natures through which one can easily see; not fragile and empty like

blown glass, but full and transparent like rock crystal.

After having clinked glasses with Jean, Croisilles, instead of drowning himself, went to the theater. There he drew from his bosom Mademoiselle Godeau's bouquet, and breathing its perfume he began to meditate on his morning's adventure. When he had reflected some time he decided that the young lady, in allowing that bouquet to slip from her grasp and refusing to take it back, wished to give him a mark of interest; otherwise her refusal and silence could have been nothing but an evidence of contempt, and such a supposition was impossible. Croisilles, therefore, decided that Mademoiselle Godeau's heart was softer than her father's and he had no difficulty in satisfying himself, that while she was crossing the room, her face had expressed an emotion that was as sincere as it seemed involuntary. But was that sentiment love or sympathy, or least of all, a natural impulse of humanity? Was Mademoiselle Godeau afraid that he was about to commit suicide, or was she merely unwilling to be the cause of the death of any man, whoever he might be? Although faded and crushed, the bouquet still retained a delicious odor and an appearance so pleasing that while inhaling its perfume and gazing at it, Croisilles could not conceal a feeling of exultation. It was a garland of roses surrounding a bunch of violets.

How many sentiments and mysteries a Turk would have discovered in interpreting their language! But in the present instance the Turk had nothing to do with it. Flowers which fall from the bosom of a pretty woman in Europe, as well as in the Orient, are never mute. If they but recount what they have seen, if they but say that they have reposed on a certain lovely bosom, that is sufficient for the most ardent lover. Perfumes resemble love, and there are those who think that love is itself a sort of perfume, and it is true that the flower which exhales it is the most beautiful in all creation.

While Croisilles was dreaming thus, paying little attention to the comedy which was being represented on the stage, Mademoiselle Godeau herself took her seat in a box directly in front of him. The idea did not occur to him that if she should see him there she might think it strange after what had taken place. On the contrary, he made every effort to attract her attention; but in vain. A dancer had come from Paris to take part in the performance of *Merope*, and the crowd was so dense that he could not move. So he tried to content himself with fixing his eyes on her. He observed that she had to make an effort to speak to those about her. Her box was surrounded, as may easily be imagined, by all the ambitious fops of which the town could boast; each in turn passed several times before

her, unable to enter the box as her father's enormous bulk closed the passage. Croisilles also observed that she did not use her glasses and that she was not paying any attention to the play. Her elbow resting on the railing, her chin in her hand, she resembled, with her general air of distraction, a Venus disguised as a marchioness; the flowing folds of her dress, her hair, her rouge, under which one suspected her pallor, all the pomp and splendor of her toilet only served to call attention to her immobility. Never had Croisilles seen her so beautiful. During the intermission he effected his escape from the imprisoning crowd and hastened to the Godeau box to look in at the little square window opening to the passage-way. Strange to say, no sooner had he reached it than Mademoiselle Godeau, who had not stirred during the entire evening, turned her head. She trembled slightly upon seeing him, but gave him only a glance; then she resumed her listless attitude. Whether that glance expressed surprise, anxiety, pleasure, or love; whether it meant, " What! you are not dead! " or, " God be praised! you are alive! " I shall not undertake to decide; but it is certain that when Croisilles saw that glance, he inwardly swore that he would win her love or die.

IV

Of all the obstacles in the path of love one of the greatest is without doubt false modesty, which is indeed a barrier. Croisilles had not the feeling produced by pride and timidity; he was not the kind of a man to hover around a woman he loved as a cat walks around a caged bird. When he gave up the idea of drowning himself his only thought was to inform his dear Julie that he had decided to live for her alone; but how could he tell her? If he should present himself a second time at the Godeau mansion he was certain that M. Godeau would have him ejected. Julie never went out to walk with her maid; it was therefore useless to think of following her. To pass the night under the windows of one's mistress is a folly dear to the hearts of youthful lovers, but in the present case it would be useless. I have already said that Croisilles was very religious; therefore it never occurred to him to try to meet his love at church. He decided that the best way, though the most dangerous, was to write, inasmuch as he could not speak to her. His letter, which had neither order nor reason, read something like the following:

Mademoiselle:

Tell me truly I beg of you, how much fortune one must possess in order to aspire to your hand. I am asking you a strange question, but I love

you so desperately that I must ask it, and you are the only one in the world to whom I could address it. It seemed to me, last evening at the theater, that you favored me with a glance. I had wished to die; would to God I had if that glance was not for me! Tell me, is fate so cruel as to deceive a man in this way? I presumed to believe that you commanded me to live. You are rich and beautiful, I know; your father is arrogant and avaricious, and you may rightfully be proud; but I love you, and all the rest is but a dream. Fix on me your charming eyes, and think what such a love as mine is capable of; even now a strange feeling of joy possesses me, although I realize that this letter may arouse your anger; but also reflect, mademoiselle, that you are to some extent responsible for my folly. Why did you drop that bouquet? Put yourself, if possible, in my place; I dare to believe that you love me, and I dare ask you to tell me so. Forgive me, I beg of you. I would give my blood to know that I am not offending you, and to see you reading this avowal with that angelic smile which is yours alone. Whatever you do, your image remains in my heart; you can not efface it except by tearing out my heart. As long as your glance shall live in my memory, as long as these flowers shall retain a trace of their fragrance, as long as words shall express love, I will cherish hope.

When he had sealed this letter, Croisilles made his way to the Godeau mansion and walked up and down in front of the house, hoping to meet a servant. Chance, which always favors secret lovers, when it can do so without compromising itself, willed it that Mademoiselle Julie's maid had arranged to purchase a bonnet that day. She was on her way to the milliner's shop when Croisilles approached her, slipped a louis into her hand, and begged her to deliver his letter. The bargain was soon closed; the servant took the money to pay for her bonnet, and promised to deliver the message. Croisilles, delighted with his good fortune, returned home and sat at his door to await an answer.

Before speaking of that reply, a word about Mademoiselle Godeau. She was not altogether free from her father's vanity, but her good nature overcame whatever defects she may have inherited from him. She was, in the full meaning of the term, a spoiled child. She was habitually quiet, talking but little, and she had never been seen with a needle in her hand; she spent entire days at her toilet and the evenings on a sofa, apparently taking no interest in the conversation around her. Regarding her dress, she was a decided coquette, and her face received more of her attention than anything else in the world. A wrinkled collar or an ink spot on her finger would make her unhappy; and when her dress

pleased her, no one could describe the parting glance she cast in her mirror before leaving her room. She seemed to exhibit neither taste nor aversion for the pleasures young ladies usually enjoy; she was ever ready to go to a ball, or would renounce going without disappointment, sometimes without motive; the theater tired her, and she was accustomed to sleep during a performance. When her father, who worshiped her, proposed to give her whatever present she might select, it took her an hour to decide, being unable to think of anything she really cared for. When M. Godeau held a reception or gave a dinner, Julie never appeared in the drawing-room, but passed the evening alone in her room, in full dress, her fan in her hand. If any one happened to pay her a compliment, she would turn her head away, and if any attempt was made to court her, she would reply with a glance so brilliant and at the same time so serious that it disconcerted the boldest. She was never known to laugh at a jest; no operatic air or sight of tragedy had ever moved her; never had her heart given a sign of life, and seeing her pass in all her radiance of her nonchalant beauty, one might have taken her for a beautiful somnambulist wandering through the world as in a trance.

It is hard to understand such indifference and so much coquetry. Some said she cared for nothing; others that she cared for nothing but her-

self. A single word, however, will explain her character: she was waiting. From the age of fourteen she had heard every one say that there was none other so charming as she; she believed it, and that is why she paid so much attention to her dress; she would have looked upon any failure to respect her person as irreverent. She walked, as it were, in her beauty as a child in its holiday dress; but she was far from believing that her beauty should be wasted; beneath her apparent indifference she concealed an inflexible will, that was all the stronger for being covered. The coquetry of ordinary women which expresses itself in glances, in mincing manners and smiles, seemed to her childish, vain, and almost contemptible. She felt that she possessed a treasure and she scorned to risk it piece by piece in a game of chance. She must have an adversary worthy of her; but being so accustomed to having every desire anticipated, she did not seek an adversary; one might say that she was astonished because he did not present himself. During the four or five years she had been in society, displaying her dresses, her laces and her beautiful shoulders, it seemed inconceivable to her that she had not inspired some great passion. If she had expressed the sentiment contained in her heart to those who paid her compliments, she would have said, "Very well, if it is true that I am so beautiful, why do you not blow your brains

out for me?" A reply that many girls might make, and one that is at the depths of many a feminine heart and which ofttimes rises to the lips.

What is there in the world more aggravating for a woman than to be young, beautiful, and rich, to survey herself in the mirror, to see herself charmingly dressed in a manner that can not fail to please, ever ready to be loved, and then compelled to say to herself: "I am admired, I am praised, society says I am beautiful, and no one loves me. My dress is of the best, my lace is superb, my toilet is irreproachable, my face the most beautiful on earth, my form perfect, my foot prettily turned, and all that aids me in nothing except to yawn in the corner of some salon! If a young man speaks to me, he treats me as a child; if he seeks me in marriage, it is for my dowry; if some one presses my hand during the dance, it is some fop from the provinces; wherever I appear I excite murmurs of admiration, but no one draws me aside and whispers in my ear a word that makes my heart palpitate. I understand the impertinent fellows who praise me loudly at a distance of two paces, and not a modest or sincere glance meets mine. I have an ardent soul, full of life, and I am not merely a pretty baby that is paraded up and down for the admiration of the applauding crowd; a baby, dressed in the morning and undressed at night,

in order to be ready for a repetition of that farce on the morrow."

That is what Mademoiselle Godeau had many times said to herself, and there were times when such thoughts filled her with such a feeling of weariness that she would sit silent and motionless for an entire day. When Croisilles wrote to her, she was in just such a mood. She had just taken her chocolate and was dreaming idly in an easy chair when her maid entered, and with an air of mystery handed her a letter. She looked at the address and failing to recognize the handwriting, resumed her musings. The maid was forced to explain the circumstances under which the letter had been received, which she did with some trepidation in doubt as to how her mistress would look upon such a procedure. Mademoiselle Godeau listened without moving, then opened the letter and cast her eye over its contents; she immediately asked for a pen and ink and carelessly penned the following reply:

"Ah! no, sir, I am not proud. If you have only one hundred thousand crowns, I would cheerfully consent to marry you."

Such was the answer the maid delivered at once to Croisilles, who gave her another louis for her trouble.

V

"A HUNDRED thousand crowns are not found in the hoof-print of an ass," and if Croisilles had been distrustful, he might have thought, in reading the letter, that Mademoiselle Godeau was either crazy or she was trifling with him. However, the thought never occurred to him; he could see nothing in it but the fact that Julie loved him and that he must have a hundred thousand crowns; also that he must set about procuring the sum at once.

He possessed two hundred louis in cash, and the house, as I have said, was worth perhaps thirty thousand francs more. What was to be done? How could he at once transform those thirty-four thousand francs into three hundred thousand? The first idea that came to his mind was to find some way of staking his entire fortune on the toss of a coin; but in order to do that, he must first sell his house. He at once prepared a sign announcing the house for sale, which he fastened on the front door; then, abandoning himself to golden dreams of the future, he waited for a purchaser.

A week passed, then another; no buyer applied. Croisilles, in distress, passed the time with Jean; he was almost in despair when a Jew broker knocked at the door.

"Is this house for sale, sir? Are you the owner?"

"Yes, sir."

"And how much is it worth?"

"Thirty thousand francs, I believe; at least I have heard my father say so."

The Jew examined all the rooms, ascended to the top floor and descended into the cellar, knocked on the walls, counted the steps in the stairway, turned all the doors on their hinges and the keys in their locks, opened and closed the windows; then after making a thorough examination of the entire building, without saying a word or making a single proposal, he bowed to Croisilles and retired.

Croisilles, who had followed him about for an hour with throbbing heart, was not a little disappointed, as may readily be imagined, at this silent withdrawal. He supposed that the Jew wanted time to reflect and that he would soon return. He waited about a week, not daring to leave the house for fear of missing his visitor, and seated at the window he watched for him night and day. But in vain; the Jew did not reappear. Jean, faithful to his unpleasant rôle of comforter, urged his master not to sell the house in such a hasty manner, and for such a hazardous purpose. Dying of impatience, of weariness, and of love, Croisilles, one fine morning, took his two hundred louis and went out, determined to try

his fortune with that sum, since he could have no more.

Gambling houses were not public institutions in those days, and they had not yet invented that refinement of civilization which permits the first comer to ruin himself whenever he desires, or whenever the idea occurs to him. No sooner had Croisilles reached the street than he stopped, not knowing where to go to risk his money. He looked at the houses along the street, eying them one after the other, trying to find something suspicious about them that would guide him in his search. A young man of good appearance, and wearing a magnificent coat, passed by him. Judging from his dress and manner, Croisilles decided that he must be a young man of good family, and politely stepped up to him.

" Sir," said he, " I beg your pardon for the liberty I am taking. I have two hundred louis in my pocket and I am very anxious to either lose them or win more. Can you direct me to some respectable place where such things are done? "

At this strange request the young man burst out laughing.

" In faith, sir," he replied, " if you are looking for such a place, you have only to follow me, for I am on my way to one at this very moment."

Croisilles followed him; and together they entered a house of respectable appearance, where

they were cordially received by an old man who seemed to be of a most sociable disposition. Several young men were already seated about a table covered with a green cloth; Croisilles modestly took his place there, and in less than an hour had lost his two hundred louis.

He left the place as sad as a young lover, who believes his love is requited, can possibly be. He did not have enough left to buy a dinner, but that was not what troubled him.

" Now what shall I do," he asked himself, " to get some money? Whom can I ask to loan me a hundred louis on that house I can not sell? "

While in that state of embarrassment, he met the Jewish broker. He did not hesitate to address him, and, foolish youth that he was, he did not hesitate to tell him the plight he was in. The Jew did not care to buy the house; he had only come to see it out of curiosity, or rather from a sense of duty, just as a dog in passing a kitchen, the door of which stands open, walks in to see what there is to steal; but he saw that Croisilles was so desperate, so sad, so stripped of all resources, that he could not resist the temptation to put himself to some little inconvenience and buy the house.

He offered him about one fourth as much as the house was worth. Croisilles threw his arms around his neck, called him his friend and savior, blindly signing a contract that was enough to

make one's hair stand on end, and, on the morrow, the happy possessor of four hundred new louis, he again directed his steps toward the gambling house where he had been so politely and so speedily ruined the day before.

On the way he passed near the wharf. A vessel was about to leave. The breeze was blowing gently, and the sea was calm. On every side, merchants, sailors, officers in uniform, were going and coming. Porters were carrying enormous bales of merchandise. Passengers were bidding their friends farewell, light crafts were sailing about the harbor; on every face one could read fear, impatience or hope; and, in the midst of the agitation which surrounded it, the majestic ship proudly floated, her enormous sails swelling in the breeze.

" What a grand thing it is," thought Croisilles, " to risk thus whatever one possesses, and to go beyond the distant seas to seek perilous fortune! It fills me with emotion to watch that vessel as it leaves the harbor, loaded with so much wealth, the fortunes of so many families! What joy to see it return bringing back twice as much as was entrusted to it, entering port so much prouder and richer than when she went away! Why am I not one of those merchants? Why should I not stake my four hundred louis on such a venture? What green cloth is equal to that immense sea on which to tempt fortune? Why should I

not buy bales of linens and silks? What is there to prevent since I have the money? Why should the captain refuse to take my merchandise? And who knows, instead of losing this little fortune in a gambling house, I may double it and even triple it by an honest investment? If Julie truly loves me, she will wait a few years and she will be faithful until I am able to marry her. Commerce sometimes yields greater returns than one would suppose; there are many instances of fortunes rapidly accumulated in a surprisingly short time on these restless waves. Why should Providence not bless an endeavor made with such a praiseworthy motive, so deserving of its protection? Among these merchants who send ships to the ends of the world, there are many who started with less than I have. They have prospered with God's blessing; why should I not succeed? It seems to me that a good wind fills those sails and that ship inspires confidence. Come, the die is cast, I am going to speak to that captain, who seems to have an honest face; I shall then write to Julie, and I hope to become a successful trader."

The greatest danger incurred by people who are weak-minded is that they may become at any time completely unbalanced. The poor fellow, without further deliberation, proceeded to carry out his whim. When one has money, it is the easiest thing in the world to buy goods, if one

knows nothing of their value. The captain, in order to oblige Croisilles, directed him to one of his friends, who sold him as much linen and silk as he could pay for. The goods were promptly taken on board. Croisilles, delighted with his bargain and full of hope, wrote his name in large letters on the bales he had just purchased. The ship weighed anchor, and he watched with great joy as she slowly sailed down the harbor.

VI

I NEED not tell you that in this venture Croisilles had risked everything. His house had been sold, he had nothing left but the clothes on his back; no place to sleep, not a sou in his pocket. Jean had no idea his master was reduced to such extremities; Croisilles was not too proud but too thoughtless to say anything to him about it. He decided to sleep under the stars; as for his meals, he made the following calculation: he presumed that it would take the vessel which bore his fortune six months to return to Havre; he determined to sell, not without regret, a gold watch his father had given him; he received for it thirty-six francs. He could thus live six months at the rate of four sous a day. He had no doubt but that was sufficient, and, the present provided for, he wrote to Mademoiselle Godeau to inform her what he

had done. He was careful not to state his present condition; on the contrary, he told her that he had made an important investment, the results of which would speedily prove immensely profitable. He explained that the " Fleurette," a sailing vessel of one hundred and fifty tons, was carrying across the Baltic his linens and silks; he implored her to be faithful for one year, and on his part he would swear eternal love for her.

When Mademoiselle Godeau received this letter, she was seated before the fire and held in her hand as a screen one of those bulletins such as are printed in ports of entry, containing a list of arrivals and departures of vessels and a record of disasters. Such a thing had never occurred to her, as may readily be imagined, as taking any interest in the movements of sailing vessels and she had never even glanced at any of those bulletins. Croisilles's letter prompted her to peruse the one she held in her hand; the first word which caught her eye was the name " Fleurette "; the ship had been wrecked off the coast of France the very night of its departure. The entire cargo was lost, the crew barely escaping with their lives.

Upon reading this piece of news, Mademoiselle Godeau remembered that Croisilles had confessed his poverty to her father. She felt as much sorrow and disappointment as though it was a loss of a million; the horrors of the tempest,

the fury of the winds, the shrieks of the drowning, the ruin of a man who loved her, suddenly presented itself to her like a scene in a romance; the bulletin and the letter fell from her hands. She arose in great distress, and her bosom heaving, her eyes filled with tears, she paced up and down the room, determined to act, but in doubt what course to pursue.

In justice to love, we must admit that the stronger the motives which combat it, the more unreasonable, the more unanswerable the arguments against it, the less common sense in it, the stronger the passion becomes and the more we love. There is nothing more beautiful under heaven than that irrationality of the heart; we would be worth but little without it. After pacing up and down the room for some time without forgetting either her fan or the passing glance in the mirror, Julie dropped back into her easy chair. Whoever could have seen her at that moment would have looked upon a beautiful sight; her eyes sparkled, her cheeks were on fire; she heaved a deep sigh, and murmured with a delicious mingling of joy and sorrow:

"Poor boy! He has ruined himself for me!"

Independent of the fortune she would inherit from her father, Mademoiselle Godeau had in her own right the property left her by her mother. She had never thought of it before; at that moment, for the first time in her life, she recalled

the fact that she possessed the sum of five hundred thousand francs. That thought made her smile; a bold project, but one distinctly feminine, almost as foolish as those of Croisilles himself, occurred to her mind. She considered the matter for some time, then decided to put it into execution.

She began by inquiring if he had any relatives or friends; the maid was at once pressed into service to find out. After some search there was found on the fourth floor of an old house an aunt, an almost helpless invalid, who had not stirred from her chair or left her room for four years. That poor woman, burdened with years, seemed to have been left in the world to serve as a specimen of human misery. Blind, gouty, almost deaf, she lived alone in a garret; but a cheerfulness that was stronger than sickness and misfortune had sustained her for years, and made her still cling to life; her neighbors never passed her door without entering, and the quaint old tunes she was accustomed to hum delighted all the girls in the neighborhood. She possessed a small income which sufficed to sustain her; she would pass the entire day at her knitting; she did not know what had happened since the death of Louis XIV.

It was this worthy old lady that Julie decided to visit. She donned all her finery for the occasion, feathers, laces, ribbons, diamonds, noth-

ing was spared: she wished to fascinate the aunt; but her natural beauty was the real motive of this whim. She mounted the dark and rickety stairway leading to the old lady's garret, and, bowing in the most gracious manner, she addressed her somewhat as follows:

" Madame, you have a nephew by the name of Croisilles who loves me and has asked for my hand; I also love him and wish to marry him; but my father, M. Godeau, farmer-general, refuses his consent because your nephew is not rich. Above all things I wish to avoid scandal, and I am unwilling to cause any one needless sorrow; I could not think of such a thing as disposing of my hand without my family's consent. I have come to you to ask a favor which I hope you will grant; I want you to go to my father yourself and propose our marriage. I possess, I am happy to say, a little fortune, which is at your service; you may have, whenever you desire, five hundred thousand francs, on deposit with the notary, subject to your order; you will say that the sum belongs to your nephew; which, in fact, it does; it is not a present I make, but a debt I discharge, for he has been ruined on my account, and it is only right that I should repair his loss. My father will not consent very readily; you must insist and you must have a little courage; I will not fail to do my part. As no one in the world has any claim on that amount to

which I refer, no one need ever know how it came into your hands. You are not rich, I am aware of that, and you may fear that such a dowry would astonish your friends; but remember that my father does not know you, that you are rarely seen in the village, and therefore it will be easy for you to arrive from a long voyage. Such a step would doubtless cost you something; you will be obliged to leave your chair, and put yourself to some trouble, but you will make two people happy, madame, and if you have ever known love, I hope you will not refuse me."

The good old lady, while listening to this strange proposal, had been at first surprised and disturbed, then affected and charmed. The last word decided her.

"Yes, my child," she repeated several times, "I know what that is, I know what that is!"

Speaking thus she made an effort to rise. Her feeble limbs would hardly support her; Julie hastened to her side to assist her. Almost involuntarily they were in each other's arms. The treaty was signed; a kiss sealed the compact.

When all necessary instructions had been given the old lady took from her closet a venerable dress of silk which she had worn on her wedding-day. The antique garment was not less than fifty years of age, but not a spot, not a speck of dust could be seen on it; Julie was full of admiration. A carriage was engaged, the

handsomest in the town. The old lady began to compose an address to M. Godeau; Julie told her how she could best touch her father's heart, and confessed to her that vanity was his vulnerable point.

"If you can think of some way of flattering his pride," she said, "the battle will be half won."

The good old lady, absorbed in deep thought, finished her toilet without a word, pressed the hand of her future niece, and entered the carriage. She soon arrived at the Godeau mansion; she stood up so straight as she entered the door that she seemed ten years younger. Majestically she traversed the salon where Julie had dropped her bouquet, and when the door of the farmer-general's office opened before her, she said in a firm voice, to the lackey who proceeded her:

"Announce the dowager baroness de Croisilles."

These words decided the happiness of the two lovers; M. Godeau was nonplussed. Although five hundred thousand francs seemed a small dowry, he was willing to ignore that in order to make a baroness of his daughter; and who dares contest that title? In my opinion she had thoroughly earned it.

PIERRE AND CAMILLE

I

THE Chevalier des Arcis, an officer in the cavalry, had left the service in 1760. Although still young, and with means amply sufficient to allow him to appear to advantage at the Court, he had tired of a bachelor's life and the pleasures of Paris. He retired to a pretty country house near Le Mans. Here, after a time, solitude, which had at first pleased him, became distasteful. He found that it was a difficult task to suddenly change from the habits of his youth. He did not repent having left the world of gaiety, but, not being able to endure living alone, he determined to marry and find, if possible, a woman with tastes similar to his own, and fond of the quiet and sedentary life that he had decided to live.

He did not wish his wife to be beautiful, nor did he want her ugly. He desired the woman he chose to be educated, intelligent, and not frivolous. What he wished for, above all, was cheerfulness and a good disposition, which he regarded as being the first qualities a woman should possess.

"It would have been better for her not to have been born."

PIERRE AND CAMILLE

I

THE Chevalier des Arcis, an officer in the cavalry, had left the service in 1760. Although still young, and with means amply sufficient to allow him to appear to advantage at the Court, he had tired of a bachelor's life and the pleasures of Paris. He retired to a pretty country house near Le Mans. Here, after a time, solitude, which had at first pleased him, became distasteful. He found that it was a difficult task to suddenly change from the habits of his youth. He did not repent having left the world of gaiety, but, not being able to endure living alone, he determined to marry and find, if possible, a woman with tastes similar to his own, and fond of the quiet and sedentary life that he had decided to live.

He did not wish his wife to be beautiful, nor did he want her ugly. He desired the woman he chose to be educated, intelligent, and not frivolous. What he wished for, above all, was cheerfulness and a good disposition, which he regarded as being the first qualities a woman should possess.

The daughter of a retired merchant, who lived in the vicinity, pleased him. As the chevalier was not dependent upon any one, he did not worry about the social gap existing between a gentleman and a merchant's daughter. He asked the father for his daughter's hand, and the request was immediately acceded to. He courted her for a few months, and then they were married.

Never was a marriage celebrated under brighter or happier auspices. As he understood his wife better, the chevalier perceived in her new qualities and a uniform sweetness of disposition. She fell deeply in love with her husband. She lived but for him, thought only of pleasing him, and not regretting the pleasures that she had sacrificed at her age, she hoped that her whole existence might pass in this solitude, which daily became more precious to her.

This solitude, however, was not absolute. Occasional visits to the town and the regular calls of a select circle of friends, from time to time, diverted them. The chevalier was pleased to frequently see his wife's parents, so that it almost seemed to her as if she was still under the paternal roof. She often ran from her husband's arms to those of her mother, and in this way enjoyed a favor that Providence accords to a few, for it is rare that a new pleasure does not destroy an old one.

Monsieur des Arcis was no less gentle and kind than his wife; but the passions of his youth and the experience he seemed to have had with the affairs of this world, at times rendered him melancholy. Cécile, as Madame des Arcis was called, religiously respected these moments of sadness. Although on this subject she neither reflected nor thought deeply, her heart readily taught her not to complain of those light clouds that destroy all happiness as soon as they are noticed, and which amount to nothing if allowed to pass.

Cécile's family was composed of substantial people, merchants enriched by hard work, and whose old age was, so to speak, one long Sunday. The chevalier liked this contentment and ease, bought by labor, and willingly joined in it. Tired of the customs of Versailles, and even of Mademoiselle Quinault's suppers, he was pleased with these manners, somewhat noisy, yet fresh and new to him. Cécile had an uncle, named Giraud, who was an excellent man and a very agreeable guest. He had been a master mason, and latterly became an architect. During this time he had amassed a fortune which yielded an income of twenty thousand francs. The chevalier's house was very much to his taste, and he was always well received there, although he sometimes appeared covered with plaster and dust. For, in spite of his age and his twenty

thousand francs, he could not resist climbing on the roofs and handling the trowel. After partaking of one or two glasses of champagne at dessert, he would often say to the chevalier, "You are happy, my nephew, you have a good little wife and a comfortable house. You lack nothing, and there is nothing to be said; so much the worse for the neighbor who may grumble. I repeat that you are happy."

One day Cécile, hearing these words, and bending toward her husband, said to him:

"Must it not be somewhat true, since you do not contradict him?"

Madame des Arcis, after a time, realized that she was enceinte. In the rear of the house there was a small hill from the top of which the whole country could be seen. The couple often strolled there together. One day, when they were seated on the grass, Cécile remarked:

"You did not dispute my uncle the other day. Do you think, however, that he was altogether right? Are you perfectly happy?"

"As happy as man can be," answered the chevalier, "and I see nothing that can add to my happiness."

"Then I am more ambitious that you," answered Cécile, "for I could easily mention something that is missing here, and which is really necessary to us."

The chevalier thought it was a question of

some trifle, and that she wished to make a detour in order to confide some woman's whim. Jokingly he made a thousand guesses, and at each question Cécile's laughter redoubled. While still jesting together, they had risen and were descending the hill. M. des Arcis quickened his steps and, tempted by the rapid slope, urged his wife on, when the latter stopped, and leaning on the chevalier's shoulder, said:

" Take care, my friend, do not make me walk so quickly. You sought a long way off for an answer to the question I asked you; we have it here beneath my petticoat."

From this day it was almost their sole topic of conversation; they spoke of their child, of the care they would bestow on it, of the way in which they would rear it, and of the plans they were already making for its future. The chevalier wished his wife to take every possible precaution to preserve the treasure she carried. He increased his attentions and his love for her, and the whole time before the birth of Cécile's child was, for her, but a long and delicious intoxication, full of the tenderest hopes.

The time fixed by nature at length arrived; a child, as beautiful as day, came into the world. It was a girl, whom they named Camille. In spite of the general custom and even against the doctor's advice, Cécile wished to nurse the little one herself. Her motherly pride was so

flattered by the beauty of her daughter, that it was impossible to separate them. It is true that rarely in a new-born babe had such regular and such remarkable features been seen; its eyes, especially, when they opened to the light, shone with wonderful luster. Cécile, who had been raised in a convent, was extremely pious. Her first thought, as soon as she was able to be dressed, was to go to the church to render thanks to God.

The child soon began to get strong and develop. As she grew, they were astonished to find her unusually quiet. No noise seemed to disturb her; she was insensible to those thousand tender words that a mother addresses to her child; while she was being rocked and sung to, she would remain with fixed and open eyes, intently watching the light of the lamp, and seeming to hear nothing. One day, while asleep, a servant overturned a chair; her mother rushed up at once, and noticed, with astonishment, that the child had not awakened. The chevalier became frightened at these indications, all too clear to be mistaken. As soon as he had carefully observed them, he understood to what misfortune his daughter was condemned. The mother wished in vain not to believe it, and by all imaginable means to turn away her husband's fears. The physician was sent for, and his diagnosis was short and not difficult. They understood that poor Camille was deprived of the senses of hearing and speech.

II

THE mother's first thought was to inquire if the misfortune was incurable, and the reply was that there had been a few cases which had been cured. For a year, in spite of the evidence before her, she continued to hope; but after having exhausted all the resources of science, they at length were compelled to abandon all hope.

Unfortunately, at this time, when so many prejudices were destroyed and replaced, there existed a most pitiless one against those poor creatures known as deaf-mutes. Noble spirits, eminent scientists, or men guided solely by a feeling of charity, had, it is true, protested against this barbarity for some time. Strange to say, it was a Spanish monk who, during the sixteenth century, was the first to think of and attempt the task, then thought impossible, of teaching deaf-mutes to communicate thought without words. His example had been followed in Italy, England, and France at various times. Bonnet, Wallis, Bulwer, and Van Helmont had brought forth important works, but they did not fully realize their good intentions. Some good had been accomplished here and there, unknown to the world, almost accidentally, and without any resultant benefit. Everywhere, even in Paris, in the heart of the most advanced civilization, deaf-

mutes were looked upon as a kind of beings separate from the rest of humanity, stamped with the seal of the wrath of Providence. Deprived of speech, the world gave them no credit for possessing the power of thought. The cloister for those who were born rich, abandonment for the poor; such was their lot. They inspired more horror than pity.

The chevalier gradually sank into the most profound melancholy. He spent the greater part of the day alone, shut up in his study or walking in the woods. When he saw his wife, he forced himself to appear tranquil and at rest, and attempted to console her, but without avail. Madame des Arcis was no less sad. A deserved misfortune may cause the tears to flow, usually too late and of no use; but a misfortune without reason benumbs the senses and discourages piety.

These two newly married people, made to love each other, in this way, commenced to see each other with pain and to avoid meeting in those same walks where they had so recently discussed a hope, so near, so peaceful, and so pure. The chevalier, involuntarily exiling himself to his house in the country, had thought only of rest; happiness had seemed to surprise him there. Madame des Arcis had only made a prudent marriage; love had come and was reciprocated. Suddenly a terrible obstacle came between them, and

this obstacle was precisely the very thing that should have been their sacred bond.

What caused this sudden and tacit separation, more terrible than a divorce, more cruel than a slow death, was that the mother, in spite of the misfortune, loved her child passionately, while the chevalier, whatever he may have wished to do, in spite of his patience and goodness, could not conquer the horror that was inspired in him by this malediction of God that had fallen upon him.

"Can I, then, hate my child?" he often asked himself during his solitary walks. "Is it her fault if the wrath of Heaven has fallen upon her? Should I not only pity her, try to lighten my wife's sorrow, hide my suffering, and watch over my child? To what a sad existence she is doomed if I, her father, abandon her! What will become of her? God sent her to me thus; it is for me to be resigned. Who would look after her? Who would bring her up? Who would protect her? She has only her mother and me in the world; she will never find a husband and will never have a brother nor sister. One unfortunate child in the world is sufficient. Unless I am utterly heartless, I should dedicate my life to helping her to endure hers."

Such were the chevalier's thoughts as he returned to the house with the firm intention of fulfilling his obligations as a father and husband.

He found his child in his wife's arms, knelt before her, and held Cécile's hands in his own. He had been told, he said, of a famous doctor, for whom he was going to send; nothing was yet determined; marvelous cures had been effected. In speaking thus, he took his daughter in his arms and walked around the room with her. But horrible thoughts seized him, in spite of himself; the idea of the future, the sight of this silence, of this incomplete being, whose senses were dormant, the reprobation, the mortification, the pity, the contempt of the world, overwhelmed him. His faced paled, his hands trembled. He returned the child to the mother, and turned aside to hide his tears.

It was at these moments that Madame des Arcis pressed her daughter to her heart with a sort of desperate tenderness, and that full look of maternal love, the most violent and the proudest of all. Never did she complain; she retired to her room, placed Camille in the cradle, and spent whole hours, mute like the child, in gazing at her.

This kind of passionate and somber exaltation became so strong that it was not rare to see Madame des Arcis preserve the most absolute silence for days at a time. In vain was she spoken to. It seemed as if she wanted to discover for herself what this darkness of the mind was in which her daughter was to live.

She spoke by signs to the child, and she alone knew how to make her understand. The rest of the household, even the chevalier himself, were as strangers to Camille. The mother of Madame des Arcis, a woman with a vulgar mind, rarely came to Chardonneux, which was the name of the chevalier's estate, unless to deplore the misfortune that had fallen on her son-in-law and her dear Cécile. Thinking to show proof of her sympathy, she ceaselessly pitied the sad condition of this poor child, and one day she remarked:

"It would have been better for her not to have been born."

"What would you have done if I had been like she is?" answered Cécile, almost angrily.

Uncle Giraud, the master mason, did not think it such a misfortune that his niece was mute.

"I have had such a loquacious wife," he would say, "that I look upon anything in the world, whatever it may be, as preferable. This little girl is certain not to indulge in idle talk, nor to listen to it, sure not to annoy a whole household by singing old opera airs, which are all alike; she will not be quarrelsome, she will not abuse the servants, as my wife always did; she will not awaken if her husband coughs, or if he arises before her in the morning to attend to his business. She will not dream aloud, but will be discreet. She will see plainly; the deaf have good eyes. She will be able to settle an account, even if she

only counts on her fingers, and to pay, if she has the money, but without disputing, as do the merchants, over the least trifle. She will naturally know a very good thing, one which is ordinarily learned only with difficulty, and that is, that it is better to act than to talk. If her heart is in the right place, people will know it without it being necessary for her to put honey on the end of her tongue. She will not laugh in company, it is true; but, at dinner, she will not hear the foolish words spoken now and then. She will be pretty, intelligent, and quiet; she will not be obliged, like the blind, to have a poodle to lead her. My faith! if I was young, I would marry her myself, when she grows up; and to-day, now that I am old and childless, I will gladly take her as a daughter, if, by chance, she annoys you."

When Uncle Giraud spoke thus a little cheerfulness reappeared, for the time being, between Monsieur des Arcis and his wife. They could neither of them help laughing at this good-natured man, somewhat blunt as he was, but respectable, and, above all, kind-hearted, and not wishing to see trouble anywhere. But the trouble was there; all the others of the family looked, with frightened and curious eyes, upon this misfortune, which was a rarity. When they drove up in a coach from the ford of Mauny, these good people sat in a circle before dinner, trying to comprehend and to reason, examining every-

thing with an air of interest, with composed faces, consulting each other in whispers as to what they should say, essaying now and then to turn away their common thought by a loud remark about a mere nothing. The mother remained before them, with her daughter on her lap, her breast uncovered, from which a few drops of milk still flowed. If Raphael had been of the family, the Madonna of the Chair might have had a sister; Madame des Arcis, quite unconsciously, was far more beautiful.

III

The little daughter was growing rapidly; nature fulfilled her task in a melancholy manner, but faithfully. Camille had only her eyes at the service of her soul; her first gestures were directed toward the light, as had been her first glances. The faintest ray of sunlight caused her transports of joy.

When she commenced to stand up and walk a very marked curiosity made her examine and touch everything surrounding her, with a delicacy combining fear and pleasure, and mingling the vivacity of a child with the modesty of a woman. Her first action was to run toward anything new, as if to seize and take possession of it; but she usually turned round, when half-way,

to look at her mother, as if to consult her. She then resembled the ermine, which, it is said, stops and turns back, if it sees that a little dirt or gravel may soil its fur.

A few of the neighbors' children came and played with Camille in the garden. It was strange to see her watching them talk. These children, of about the same age as herself, naturally attempted to repeat the words spoken by their nurses, and tried, by moving their lips, to exercise their intelligence by means of a noise which, to the poor girl, was only a motion. Often, to show that she had understood, she would stretch out her hands to her little friends, who would draw back afraid of this different expression of their own thoughts.

Madame des Arcis did not leave her daughter. She observed, with anxiety, the small actions, the least sign of development in Camille. If she had been able to guess that the Abbé de l'Épée would soon come and bring light into this world of darkness, how great would have been her joy! But she could do nothing, and remained powerless before this evil of chance, which the courage and piety of a man was about to destroy. It is strange that a priest should see more than a mother, and that the mind that discerns should discover that which the suffering heart lacks.

When Camille's little friends were of an age to receive their first instructions from a gov-

erness, the poor child began to show a great sadness at not being given the same attention as the others. One of the neighbors had an old English governess who had great trouble in teaching a little girl to spell, and treated her severely. Camille was present during the lesson and watched her little companion with surprise, following her efforts with her eyes, and attempting, so to speak, to help her; she also cried with her when she was scolded.

Music lessons were, for her, the subject of still greater pain. Standing near the piano, she stiffened and moved her little fingers while watching the teacher with her eyes, which were black and very beautiful. She seemed to inquire what was going on, and sometimes struck the keys in a gentle yet irritated manner.

The impression that people or exterior objects produced on the other children did not seem to surprise her. She noticed things and, like the others, remembered them. But when she saw them pointing at these same things with their fingers, and observed that movement of the lips which was unintelligible to her, then her sorrow returned. She retired to a corner, and, with a stone or piece of wood, she almost mechanically traced in the sand a few capital letters which she had seen others form and which she attentively studied.

The evening prayer, which the neighbor had

her children repeat every day, was to Camille like an enigma which almost resembled a mystery. She kneeled with her companions and joined her hands without understanding the reason. The chevalier saw in this a profanation: "Take that little one away," he would say; "spare me that mockery."

"I take it upon myself to ask God's pardon," answered the mother one day.

Camille early showed indications of possessing that strange faculty which the Scotch call second sight, that the followers of magnetism wish to have acknowledged, and which the doctors generally classify with the diseases. The little deaf-mute felt the approach of the ones she loved, and often went to meet them, without anything having forewarned her of their arrival.

Not only did the other children approach her with a sort of fear, but they sometimes shunned her with an air of scorn. It happened that one of them, with that lack of pity of which La Fontaine speaks, came and spoke to her for some time, looking in her face and laughing, asking her to reply. When these groups of little children danced, which they will do as long as they can on their little legs, Camille only watched them; already a half-grown girl, when the old refrain was sung:

"Enter in the dance,
See how we dance . . ."

Alone and apart, leaning against a seat, she stood and followed the measure, balancing her pretty head, without attempting to mix with the company, but sad and gentle enough to inspire pity.

One of the hardest tasks this unfortunate soul attempted was to try to count with a little neighbor who was learning arithmetic. It was a very easy and short sum. Her companion was struggling with several numbers, somewhat mixed. The total did not amount to more than twelve or fifteen units. The neighbor counted on her fingers. Camille, understanding that it was wrong, and wishing to help, extended her two open hands. They had given to her the first and most simple ideas; she knew that two and two make four. An intelligent animal, even a bird, can count in one way or another, of which we are ignorant, up to two or three. A magpie, they say, has even counted five. Camille, under the circumstances, should have been able to count still more. Her hands only went as far as ten. She held them open before her little companion with such a good-natured look that one might have thought her an honest man unable to pay his debts.

Coquetry shows itself at an early age in women. Camille gave no indications of it.

"It is, however, strange," said the chevalier, "that a little girl does not understand what a

hat is!" At these words Madame des Arcis sadly smiled.

"But she is beautiful!" said she to her husband; and, at the same time, she gently touched Camille, to have her walk in front of her father, so that he could see her figure, which began to develop, and notice her childlike step, which was still so charming.

As she advanced in age, Camille became passionately fond, not of religion, which she did not comprehend, but of churches, which she could see. Perhaps she had, in her soul, that invincible instinct which causes a child of ten to conceive and retain the project of putting on a woolen dress, to look for those who are poor and suffering, and to spend an entire life in this way. Many ordinary persons and even philosophers will pass away before one of them can explain such a mystery, but it, nevertheless, exists.

"When I was a child, I did not see God, I only saw the heavens," is certainly a sublime idea, written, as you know, by a deaf-mute. Camille was far from having so much power of thought. A rough plaster image of the Virgin, colored with white lead and blue paint, somewhat like a shop sign; a choir boy of the provinces, whose old surplice covers his cassock, and whose faint and silvery voice causes the window-panes to mournfully reverberate, without Camille being able to hear anything; the beadle's walk; the verger's

airs—all attracted her attention; but who knows what makes a child raise its eyes? But what does it matter as long as the eyes are raised?

IV

"But she is beautiful!" the chevalier repeated to himself, and, in fact, Camille was beautiful. In the perfect oval of a regular face, upon features of an admirable purity and freshness, there shone, so to speak, the light of a good heart. Camille was small, not at all pale, but very fair, and with long black hair. She was naturally of a gay and active disposition; rarely sad, and almost indifferent to the misfortune with which she was afflicted; in her little pantomime, she was full of grace, spirit and energy in all her movements; she was singularly skilful in making herself understood; quick to grasp the meaning of anything; and always obedient when she comprehended. The chevalier, sometimes, like Madame des Arcis, remained watching his daughter, without speaking. Such grace and beauty, joined to so much misfortune and horror, almost turned his brain. He was often seen embracing Camille fondly, saying aloud: "I am not such a bad man!"

There was a path in the woods, in the rear of the garden, where the chevalier was accustomed

to stroll after breakfast. From the window of her room, Madame des Arcis saw her husband coming and going between the trees. She hardly dared to join him. With a sorrow full of bitterness she watched this man, who had been to her more of a lover than a husband, who had never said a harsh word to her, to whom she had never spoken unkindly, and who no longer had the courage to love her because she was a mother.

She risked it, however, one morning. She came down in her dressing-gown, beautiful as an angel, her heart throbbing; she was excited about a children's party to be given at the house of a neighbor. Madame des Arcis wished to have Camille attend. She desired to see the effect that her daughter's beauty would produce upon her husband and the world. She had spent sleepless nights thinking of how she would dress her; she cherished the fondest hopes on this subject. "He shall be proud of her, and the others must be jealous of that poor little girl, once for all," she would say to herself. "She will say nothing, but she will be the most beautiful."

As soon as the chevalier noticed his wife coming toward him, he went to meet her, and took her by the hand, which he respectfully kissed with a gallantry which he had acquired at Versailles and which he had never forgotten, in spite of his natural good humor. They began by ex-

changing a few insignificant words, and then walked on together.

Madame des Arcis was wondering how best to broach to her husband the subject of taking her daughter to the party, and in this way to break a rule he had made, since Camille's birth, of no longer appearing in society. Even the thought of exposing his misfortune to the eyes of those who were indifferent or malicious, caused the chevalier to be almost beside himself. He had formally announced his intention on the subject. It was therefore necessary for Madame des Arcis to find an expedient, some pretext, not only for executing her design, but for suggesting it.

Meanwhile, the chevalier appeared to be thinking deeply. He was the first to break the silence. An unexpected business affair, which had just happened to one of his relatives, had greatly embarrassed the fortune of his family. It was important that he should interview those who were placed in charge of the matter. His interests, and consequently those of Madame des Arcis were in danger of being compromised through the lack of careful surveillance. Briefly, he announced that it was necessary for him to make a short trip to Holland, where he was to have an understanding with his banker. He added that the business was extremely urgent, and that he expected to leave the next morning.

It was only too easy for Madame des Arcis to comprehend the reason of this journey. The chevalier was far from entertaining the thought of deserting his wife; but, in spite of himself, he felt an irresistible desire to completely isolate himself for a time, if only to become more resigned. All real sorrow usually produces in man this need of solitude, just as physical pain does in the case of animals.

Madame des Arcis was at first so surprised that she could only answer with those commonplace remarks that one always has on the tip of one's tongue when one can not express one's thoughts. She found this journey quite natural; the chevalier was right, she understood the importance of this matter, and did not oppose it. While she spoke, her heart was full of sorrow; she said she felt tired, and sat upon a bench.

She remained there, absorbed in a profound reverie, her eyes fixed, and her arms hanging by her side. Up to that time, Madame des Arcis had experienced neither great happiness nor great pleasure. Although not a woman of marked intelligence, she was sensitive, and came of a family of tradespeople and knew what it was to suffer, somewhat, from the imaginary tinge of commercialism. Her marriage had been quite an unexpected happiness, entirely a new feeling; a light had flashed before her eyes in the midst

of long, dreary days, and now darkness was again coming upon her.

She remained thoughtful for some time. The chevalier turned away his eyes, and seemed anxious to return to the house. He arose and then sat down again. At length Madame des Arcis arose and took her husband's arm; they returned together.

When the hour for dinner arrived, Madame des Arcis sent word that she was not well and would not be present. In her room was a prie-dieu before which she remained on her knees until night. Her maid entered several times, having received secret orders from the chevalier to watch over her; she did not answer when addressed. Toward eight o'clock she summoned the maid, asked for her daughter's dress, which was ordered for the party, and requested the carriage to be ready. At the same time, she sent a message to the chevalier that she was going to the party, and that she hoped he would accompany her.

Camille had the figure of a child, but most graceful and slight. Upon this lovely form, the outline of which began to develop, the mother placed a simple new dress, an embroidered robe of white muslin, little shoes of white satin, a necklace of American beads around her neck, and a wreath of corn-flowers on her head; such was the attire of Camille, who proudly admired herself

before the mirror and danced with joy. The mother, dressed in a long velvet gown, as one who did not expect to dance, held her child before the cheval-glass, kissed her again and again, and repeated all the time: "You are beautiful, you are beautiful!" When the chevalier entered, Madame des Arcis, without any apparent emotion, asked the servant if the carriage was waiting, and inquired of her husband if he was going. The chevalier gave his hand to his wife and they went to the party.

It was the first time Camille had been seen in public. She had, however, been often spoken of. Curiosity attracted all eyes toward the little girl as soon as she appeared. It was expected that Madame des Arcis would be somewhat embarrassed and anxious, but such was not the case. After the customary greetings, she sat down in the calmest manner, and while every one watched her child with a sort of astonishment or an air of affected interest, she allowed her to wander about the room without appearing to notice her.

Camille found her little friends there; she ran first to one, then to another, just as she had done in the garden. However, they all received her with reserve and apparent coolness. The chevalier, standing at one side, suffered visibly. His friends came and praised his daughter's beauty; acquaintances, and even strangers, approached him for the purpose of complimenting him. He

felt that they were consoling him, and it was hardly to his taste. However, a look which he could not mistake, the assurance of every one, gradually brought joy back to his heart. After having greeted nearly every one by gestures, Camille remained standing by her mother's knees. They had noticed her going from side to side; they expected something strange, or at least curious; she had done nothing only bow a pleasant "good evening," had shaken hands with some English girls, and had thrown kisses to the mothers of her little friends, all, perhaps, learned by heart, but gracefully and naïvely done. Having quietly returned to her place, every one began to admire her. In fact, nothing was more beautiful than this living form, closed against the outside world, and from which her poor soul was unable to escape. Her figure, her face, her long curly hair, her eyes especially, incomparably brilliant, surprised every one. At the same time that her eyes attempted to divine everything, and her gestures to express all, her reflective and melancholy air gave to her every movement, to her childish ways and poses, a certain aspect of grandeur; a painter or a sculptor would have been inspired by it. They approached Madame des Arcis, surrounded her, asked many questions of Camille by gestures; instead of astonishment and repugnance, there was a sincere good-will, a frank sympathy. Exaggeration, which always

exists as soon as one neighbor repeats anything to another, soon appeared. Never had such a charming child been seen; nothing approached her; no one was as beautiful as she. In fact, Camille had a complete triumph, which she was far from understanding.

Madame des Arcis comprehended it. Always outwardly calm, her heart throbbed that night with the happiest and purest emotions of her life. Her husband and she had exchanged smiles, which compensated for the many tears she had shed.

Meanwhile, a young girl sat down at the piano and played some dance music. The children joined hands, took their places and began to execute the steps that the dancing-master had taught them. The parents began to compliment each other, to pass favorable remarks on the fête, and to speak of the gracefulness of their children. It was soon only a loud noise of childish laughter, jokes between the young men, talk about dress among the young girls, chatting among the fathers, sarcastic politeness between the mothers, and, in short, a regular provincial children's party.

The chevalier's eyes never left his daughter, who, as one may imagine, did not join in the dance. Camille watched the fête with a rather sad expression. A little boy came and invited her to dance. In answer she shook her head; a

few corn-flowers fell from her wreath, which was not very firm. Madame des Arcis picked them up, and, with pins, soon repaired the damage to the coiffure which she had made; but she looked in vain for her husband; he was no longer in the room. She asked if he had left, and if he had taken the carriage. They answered that he had walked home.

V

THE chevalier had decided to depart without saying good-by to his wife. He feared and avoided any annoying explanations; and, as it was his purpose to return very shortly, he thought it was wiser to simply leave a letter behind him. It was not altogether true that business required his presence in Holland; however, the journey might be beneficial. One of his friends wrote a letter to Chardonneaux urging his departure; it was a prearranged pretext. Upon returning, he acted as a man obliged, unexpectedly, to go away. He ordered his trunks to be packed in great haste, sent them to the town, mounted his horse, and departed.

However, an involuntary hesitation and a great regret took possession of him when he had left the house. He feared he had, too quickly, obeyed a sentiment that he might have conquered, and that he might cause his wife unneces-

sary tears, and, moreover, that he might fail to find that contentment which, perhaps, really existed at home, if he only understood. "But who knows," he thought, "if I am not, on the contrary, doing a proper and sensible thing? Who knows if the passing sorrow my absence may cause will not give us happier days? I am overwhelmed by a misfortune, of which God alone knows the cause; I am withdrawing, for a few days, from the place where I suffer. The change, the journey, even the fatigue, will perhaps calm my emotions; I am going to occupy my time with things material, important, necessary; I shall return with a more tranquil and contented mind; I shall have reflected and shall know better what I must do. However, Cécile will suffer," he thought. But his mind was fixed, and he continued on his way.

Madame des Arcis left the party at about eleven o'clock. She had entered the carriage with her daughter, who soon fell fast asleep upon her lap. Although she was ignorant of the fact that the chevalier had so promptly executed his project of traveling, she suffered, nevertheless, at having left her neighbor's house alone. That which, in the eyes of the world, is only an absence of regard, becomes an actual suffering to whoever suspects the cause. The chevalier had been unable to endure the public spectacle of his misfortune. The mother had desired to show it,

and thus attempt to conquer it. She could easily have forgiven her husband a moment of sadness or bad humor; but one must remember that, in the provinces, such a manner of leaving one's wife and child is an almost unheard of thing; and, in such cases, the merest trifle, a cloak, for instance, which one may be looking for, when he who should find it is not present, has sometimes done more harm than all the good that the respect for conventionality could do.

While the carriage rolled slowly over the stones of a newly made road, Madame des Arcis, watching over her sleeping daughter, yielded to the saddest forebodings. Holding Camille in such a way that the jolting would not awaken her, she mused with that fervor that night gives to the thoughts, of the fatality that seemed to pursue her, even in the most natural joy she had just experienced at the party. A strange turn of mind made her think now of her own past and of her daughter's future. "What will happen?" she said to herself. "My husband leaves me; if he does not leave to-day, he will to-morrow; all my efforts, all my prayers, will only annoy him; his love for me is dead; his pity remains, but his sorrow is stronger than he or myself. My daughter is beautiful, but doomed to misfortune. What shall I do? What can I forecast or prevent? If I consecrate myself to this poor child, as I should, and as I am doing, I must renounce

my husband. He flees from us, and looks upon us with horror. If I attempt, on the contrary, to draw nearer to him, if I dare to recall his old love, will he not ask me to separate from my daughter? May he not wish to confide Camille to the care of strangers, and thus rid himself of a sight which troubles him?"

While meditating thus, Madame des Arcis kissed Camille.

"Poor child!" said she; "I abandon you! I, to buy the semblance of happiness which would, in turn, escape me, at the cost of your repose, perhaps, of your life! To cease to be a mother, in order to be a wife! If such a thing was possible, would it not be better to die rather than have it so?"

Then she returned to her conjectures. "What is about to happen?" she asked herself again. "What will Providence ordain? God watches over all, and sees us as well as others. What will He do with us? What will become of this poor child?"

Some distance from Chardonneaux, there was a ford to be crossed. For about a month there had been heavy rains, so much so that the river had overflowed and covered the surrounding meadows. The ferryman, at first, refused to allow the carriage on his ferry-boat, and said that they must unharness the team and that he would cross the stream with the people and the horses,

but not with the carriage. Madame des Arcis, anxious to see her husband again, refused to get out. She ordered the coachman to drive onto the boat; it took but a few minutes to cross, and she had done so a hundred times.

In the middle of the ford the boat began to drift, carried by the current. The ferryman asked the coachman to help him or they would be driven over the dam. There was in fact, two or three hundred feet down-stream, a mill with a dam made of timbers, piles, and boards fastened together, but now old and broken by the water, and rather a kind of cascade, or waterfall. It was certain that if they allowed themselves to drift there would be an awful accident.

The coachman alighted from his box; he wished to lend a helping hand, but there was only one pole in the ferry-boat. The ferryman did all he could, but the night was dark. A mist blinded the two men, who now relieved each other, now used their combined strength in their effort to reach the shore.

As the roar of the water grew louder, the danger became more terrifying. The boat, heavily laden, and driven against the current by two vigorous men, did not move very rapidly. When the pole was deeply imbedded and tightly held in front, the ferry-boat swayed from side to side, or turned around; but the current was too strong. Madame des Arcis, who remained in the carriage

with the child, and was in great terror, opened the window.

"Are we lost?" she cried. At this moment the pole broke. The two men fell in the boat, exhausted, their hands bruised.

The ferryman could swim, but the coachman could not. There was no time to be lost.

"Father Georgeot," said Madame des Arcis to the ferryman, "can you save us—my daughter and me?"

Father Georgeot looked at the water, then at the shore.

"Certainly," he answered, shrugging his shoulders, with an almost offended look at such a question being addressed to him.

"What must we do?" said Madame des Arcis.

"Rest your weight on my shoulders," answered the ferryman. "Keep your dress on, it will support you. Place both your arms around my neck, have no fear, but do not cling too tightly or we shall be drowned. Do not cry out, you will only swallow water if you do. As for the little one, I will hold her with one hand, by the waist, above the water to prevent her being wet; with the other, I will swim on my side. The potatoes, in the field yonder, are hardly the distance of twenty-five strokes from here."

"And Jean?" said Madame des Arcis, referring to the coachman.

"Jean will swallow a little water, but will sur-

vive. Let him drift to the dam and wait. I will return for him.

Father Georgeot plunged into the water with his double burden, but he had misjudged his strength. He was no longer a young man; far from it. The shore was farther than he had calculated, and the current stronger than he had thought. However, he did his best to reach land, but was soon carried away. The trunk of a willow tree, covered by the water, which he had not observed in the darkness, suddenly stopped him. He had violently struck his forehead against it. The blood flowed and obscured his sight.

"Take your daughter and put her upon my neck," he said, "or upon yours. I can do no more."

"Could you save her if you carried her alone?" asked the mother.

"I do not know, but I think I could," answered the ferryman.

Madame des Arcis did not answer, but unclasped her arms from around the man's neck, and sank into the water.

When the ferryman had placed little Camille safely on the shore, the coachman, who had been rescued by a peasant, assisted in the search for the body of Madame des Arcis. They found the corpse the following morning, near the bank.

VI

A YEAR after this catastrophe, in a well-furnished room of a hotel, situated in the Rue du Bouloi, in Paris, the coaching district, a young girl in mourning was seated near a table, close to the fire. On the table was a bottle of ordinary wine, half empty, and a glass. A man, bent by age, but of an open and frank countenance, clothed almost like a working man, was walking up and down the room. Occasionally he approached the young girl, stopped before her and looked at her with an air almost paternal. She then extended her arm, quickly raised the bottle, but with a sort of involuntary repugnance, and refilled the glass. The old man drank a little, then resumed walking, gesticulating all the time in a singular and almost ridiculous manner, while the young girl, sadly smiling, attentively followed his movements.

It would have been difficult for an observer to have guessed the relationship between these two people: the one motionless, cold as marble, but full of grace and distinction, expressing on her face and in her every gesture something more than ordinary beauty; the other quite vulgar in appearance, his clothing in disorder, his hat on his head, drinking the common wine of an inn,

and the nails of his shoes resounding on the floor. It was a strange contrast.

These two people were, nevertheless, united by a very true and tender affection. They were Camille and Uncle Giraud. This kind old man had come to Chardonneux to the funeral of Madame des Arcis, when she had first been carried to the church, and then to her last resting-place. Her mother being dead, her father gone, the poor child found herself entirely alone in the world. The chevalier, on having left the house, distracted by his journey, called away by business, and obliged to visit several towns in Holland, had only heard very lately of his wife's death; almost a month had passed, during which time Camille remained, so to speak, an orphan. It is true, there was in the house a kind of governess, who had the care of the young girl; but the mother, when alive, would not permit any one else to have the charge of her daughter. This position was a sinecure; the governess hardly knew Camille, and could be of no assistance whatever to her under the circumstances.

The young girl's sorrow, at the time of her mother's death, had been so violent that for a long time her life was despaired of. When the body of Madame des Arcis had been taken from the water and carried into the house, Camille accompanied this funeral procession uttering such heartrending cries of distress that the neighbors

were almost afraid of her. There was, in fact, something terrifying in this being whom they were accustomed to see mute, gentle, and tranquil, and who suddenly emerged from her silence in the presence of death. The inarticulate noises that escaped her lips and which she alone was unable to hear, had something of the savage about them. They were neither words nor sobs, but a kind of horrible language which seemed to have been invented by sorrow. During a day and a night, these awful cries filled the house. Camille ran about, tearing her hair and striking the walls. In vain they attempted to comfort her; even force was useless. It was only exhausted nature that finally made her drop at the foot of the bed where the body of her mother was laid.

Almost as quickly she had appeared to regain her accustomed tranquillity, and, so to speak, forget everything. She remained for some time apparently calm, walking all day at random, with a slow and heedless step, declining none of the attention they gave to her.

They thought she had recovered, and the physician who had been summoned was mistaken as was every one else; a nervous fever soon developed accompanied by the gravest symptoms. It was necessary to constantly watch over the sick girl—her reason seemed entirely gone.

It was then that Uncle Giraud resolved, at all costs, to come to console his niece.

" Since she has neither father nor mother," he said to the members of the household, " I, her granduncle, declare myself, for the present, charged with caring for her and preventing any misfortune befalling her. I have always loved the child. I have often asked her father to give her to me to cheer my life. I do not wish to deprive him of her, she is his daughter, but for the time being I take possession of her. Upon his return, I will faithfully surrender her to him."

Uncle Giraud had not much confidence in doctors, for the very good reason that he hardly believed in illness, having never been sick himself. A nervous fever, especially, appeared to him a fancy, a pure derangement of ideas, that a little diversion should soon cure. So he had decided to take Camille to Paris. " You see," he again remarked, " that she is melancholy, poor child! She does nothing but weep, and she is right—a mother dies only once. But the daughter must not die because the mother has just departed. We must try to make her think of other things. It is said that Paris is a very good place for that. I do not know Paris, nor does she. I will take her there; it will do us both good. Besides, if there is only the journey, it should be of great benefit to her. I have had trouble, like

others, but every time I have seen a postilion's queue wagging before me I have been made more cheerful.

In this way Camille and her uncle had arrived in Paris. The chevalier, informed of the journey by a letter from Uncle Giraud, approved it. Returning from his tour in Holland, he had brought back to Chardonneux a sadness so profound that it was almost impossible for him to see any one, even his daughter. He seemed to wish to avoid every living thing and even to try to hide from himself. Always alone, riding on horseback in the woods, he tired himself out physically in order, by sleep, to gain peace for his soul. A secret and incurable sorrow devoured him. From the depths of his heart he reproached himself for having made his wife's life unhappy, and for having contributed to her death. "If I had been there," he said to himself, "she would be alive, and I should have been there." This thought, which never left him, poisoned his life.

He wished that Camille might be happy; he was ready, when the occasion arose, to make the greatest sacrifices with this end in view. His first thought, on returning to Chardonneux, had been to replace, for his daughter's sake, she whom he had lost, and to pay with usury that debt of the heart which he had incurred. But the memory of the resemblance between the mother and her child caused him, in advance, in-

tolerable sorrow. It was in vain that he tried to deceive himself regarding this very grief, and that he wished to persuade himself that it would rather be a consolation to his eyes, an alleviation of his suffering, in this way to find again in his daughter's countenance the features of her for whom he wept incessantly.

Camille, in spite of all, was to him a living reproach, a witness of his fault and misfortune, which he did not feel strong enough to endure.

Uncle Giraud did not pay so much attention to it. He thought only of enlivening his niece and making her life as pleasant as possible. Unhappily, this was not an easy matter. Camille had allowed herself to be led away without resistance, but she had refused to join in any of the pleasures which the good man proposed. Walks, fêtes, theaters, nothing could tempt her. In answer to everything she pointed to her black dress.

The old master mason was obstinate. He had rented, as we have seen, a furnished apartment in a hotel in the *Messageries,* the first one that the clerk had shown him, expecting to stay there only a month or two. He had now been there with Camille nearly a year. For twelve months Camille had declined all his proposals of entertainment, and, as he was at the same time as good and patient as he was obdurate, he had waited for a year without complaint. He loved

this poor girl with all his heart, without knowing the reason, by one of those inexplicable charms that joins goodness to misfortune.

" But, after all, I do not know," he said, finishing the bottle, " what can prevent your coming to the opera with me. It costs a great deal of money; I have the tickets in my pocket; your year of mourning was ended yesterday; you have two new dresses, and, besides, you have only to put on your wrap, and . . ."

He stopped. " The devil! " said he, " you hear nothing, and I had forgotten that. But what matter? It is not necessary in such a place. You will not hear. I will not listen. We shall watch the dancing, that is all."

So spoke the good uncle, who would never remember, when there was anything interesting to say, that his niece could neither hear nor speak. He chatted with her, in spite of himself. On the other hand, when he attempted to express himself by means of signs it was still worse; she understood him even less. So he had to follow the habit of talking to her as he would to any one else; in gesticulating, it is true, with all his force. Camille had come to understand this method of communication and found means to answer, in her own way.

Camille's mourning was now, indeed, at an end, as the good man had said. He had ordered two beautiful dresses made for his niece, and

presented them to her with such a tender and supplicating air, that she threw her arms around his neck to thank him, and then sat down with the calm sadness that was habitual to her.

"But that is not all," said the uncle, "you must put them on—these beautiful dresses. They were made to be worn and they are pretty." And, while speaking, he walked up and down the room holding up the dresses and exhibiting them.

Camille had cried sufficient for a moment of joy to be allowed her. For the first time since the death of her mother, she stood before the mirror, took one of the dresses which her uncle was showing her, looked at him tenderly, held out her hand, and made a little nod with her head as if to say "Yes."

At this sign the goodman Giraud began to leap about in his rough shoes, like a child. He was triumphing. The hour had at length arrived when he would accomplish his purpose: Camille was about to attire herself, go out with him, visit the opera, and see the world. He could hardly restrain himself at this thought: he kissed his niece repeatedly, calling out all the while for the maid, the servants, and every one in the house.

Her toilet completed, Camille was so beautiful that she seemed to realize it herself, and smiled at her own image.

"The carriage is waiting," said Uncle Giraud,

imitating, with his arms, the action of a coachman whipping his horses, and, with his mouth, the noise of a carriage. Camille smiled again, took the mourning-dress which she had just taken off, folded it with care, kissed it, placed it in the wardrobe, and accompanied him.

VII

If Uncle Giraud was not elegant in his person, he prided himself, at any rate, on knowing how to do things properly. What did he care if his clothes, always brand-new and much too large, for he did not wish to be uncomfortable, fitted him badly, that his hose was carelessly adjusted, and that his wig was drawn down almost over his eyes. But when he entertained others, above all, he insisted on the best and most costly of everything. And, in fact, he had engaged, for that evening, one of the best boxes, well in front, so that his niece might be seen by every one.

Camille's first glance at the stage and the audience dazzled her, and no wonder; a young girl, hardly sixteen, brought up in the country, and finding herself suddenly transported into the midst of luxury, art, and pleasure, must have almost believed herself dreaming. They were performing a ballet; Camille followed, with curiosity, the attitudes, gestures and steps of the

dancers. She realized that it was a pantomime, and, as she was accustomed to that, she endeavored to understand it. Every now and then she turned to her uncle, with an astonished air, as if to consult him; but he comprehended it hardly better than she did. She saw shepherds in silken hose offering flowers to their shepherdesses, angels fluttering and suspended at the end of cords, and gods resting upon clouds. The decorations, the lights, the brilliancy of which charmed her, the dresses of the ladies, the embroideries, the feathers, all the pomp of a spectacle hitherto unknown to her, thrilled her with pleasing astonishment.

She herself soon became the object of an almost general attention. Her toilet was simple, but in the best of taste; alone, in a spacious box, by the side of a man as uncouth as was Uncle Giraud; beautiful as a star and fresh as a rose, with her large black eyes and her air of naïveté, she necessarily attracted all eyes. The men began to call the attention of each other to her, the women to observe her. Marquises approached, and the most flattering compliments, uttered loudly, according to the custom of the time, were addressed to the new arrival. Unfortunately, Uncle Giraud alone gathered this homage, which he received with relish.

However, Camille, little by little, at first regained her tranquil air, then a feeling of sadness

came over her. She felt how cruel it was to be isolated in the midst of that crowd. These people conversing in their boxes, these musicians whose instruments regulated the steps of the dancers, this great exchange of thoughts between the actors and the audience—all this, so to speak, made her again withdraw within herself.

"We speak and you do not," every one seemed to be saying. "We listen, we laugh, we sing, we love, we enjoy everything; you alone enjoy nothing, you alone hear nothing, you alone are but a statue here, the fantom of a being who but looks on life from a distance."

Camille closed her eyes to shut out this scene. She remembered that children's party where she had seen her companions dancing, and where she had remained quiet near her mother. Her thoughts carried her back to the home where she was born, to her unhappy childhood, her long suffering, her secret tears, her mother's death, and, finally, to that mourning she had just cast off and which she resolved to put on again when she returned to the hotel. Since she was condemned forever, it seemed better for her never to attempt to be happy. She felt, more bitterly than ever, that all her efforts to resist the malediction of Heaven were useless. Filled with this thought, she was unable to restrain a few tears, which Uncle Giraud noticed. He tried to find out the cause, when she gestured to him that

she wished to leave. The goodman, surprised and anxious, hesitated and did not know what to do. Camille arose and pointed to the door of the box, that he might bring her cloak.

At this moment she noticed beneath her, in the audience, a fine-looking young man, very elegantly dressed, who held in his hand a small slate, on which he drew letters and figures with a little white pencil. Then he showed the slate to his neighbor, an older man than he; the latter seemed to comprehend at once, and promptly answered the same way. At the same time, by opening and closing their fingers, they both exchanged certain signs which seemed to enable them better to communicate their ideas.

Camille understood nothing, neither the drawings on the slate which she could see, nor the signs with their fingers which she did not comprehend; but she had noticed from the first glance that the young man did not move his lips. Ready to depart, she hesitated. She saw that he communicated his thoughts in a manner different from every one else, and that he found means to express himself without that movement of the lips so incomprehensible to her, and which was the torment of her thoughts. Whatever this strange language might be, an extreme surprise, an invincible desire to know more of it, made her resume the place she had just left; she leaned over the edge of the box, and attentively watched

what this stranger was doing. Seeing him write on the slate again and present it to his neighbor, she made an involuntary movement as if to catch it in passing. At this motion the young man turned around and, in his turn, looked at Camille. Hardly had their eyes met when they both remained, at first motionless and undecided, as if trying to recognize each other; then, in an instant, they understood each other, and seemed to say with a look: "We are both mute."

Uncle Giraud brought his niece her cloak and opera-glasses, but she no longer wished to depart. She had reseated herself, and remained leaning her elbows on the balustrade.

The Abbé de l'Épée had just begun to make himself known.

Visiting a lady in the Rue des Fossés-Saint-Victor, and touched with the pity for two deaf-mutes he by chance had seen doing embroidery, the charity that filled his soul had been suddenly awakened, and was already working wonders. In the crude pantomime of these miserable and unfortunate beings, he had discovered the foundation of a valuable language, which he thought might become universal, better, in any case, than that of Leibnitz, who, like most men of genius, had perhaps, in expecting too much, gone beyond his goal. But it was already a good deal to have seen its greatness. Whatever may have been his ambition, he taught deaf-mutes to read

and write. He returned them to their places among men. Alone and without help, by his own efforts, he had undertaken to establish a colony of these unfortunates, and he was preparing to sacrifice to this project his life and his fortune, until the king should notice them.

The young man seated near Camille's box was one of the abbé's pupils. Born a gentleman of a noble family, gifted with great intelligence, but afflicted with this *semi-death*, as it was then called, he had been one of the first to receive about the same instruction as the Comte de Solar, with this difference, that he was rich, and did not run the risk of dying of hunger, for lack of an allowance from the Duc de Penthièvre. In addition to the abbé's lessons, they had given him a tutor, who, being a layman, could accompany him everywhere, and was charged with attending him and directing his thoughts; this was the companion who read from the slate. With great care and application the young man profited by these daily studies, which developed his mind in every way, the riding-school, the opera, the lecture, and the mass. Nevertheless, a little natural pride and a very pronounced independence of character struggled in him against this laborious application. He knew nothing of the difficulties which might have overtaken him if he had been born in a lower rank or even like Camille, in any other place than Paris. One of

the first things they had taught him, when he began to spell, was the name of his father, the Marquis de Maubray. So he knew that he was different from other men both by the privilege of birth and by the affliction of nature. Pride and humiliation thus disputed, in a noble mind, which, happily, or perhaps necessarily, had remained simple.

This marquis, a deaf-mute, observing and comprehending others, as haughty as any of them, who had also, together with his tutor, drawn his red heels through the great salons of Versailles, according to the customs of the time, was glanced at by more than one pretty woman, but his eyes never left Camille. She saw him very well, without appearing to look at him. The opera finished, she took her uncle's arm, and, not daring to turn around, went home pensively.

VIII

It is needless to say that neither Camille nor Uncle Giraud knew of the Abbé l'Épée; still less did they have knowledge of a new science which enabled mutes to communicate thought. The chevalier might have known of this discovery; his wife certainly would have learned of it had she lived. But Chardonneux was some distance from Paris. The chevalier did not subscribe to

a newspaper, or if he received one he did not read it. Thus, a few leagues of distance, a lack of observation or death, could produce the same result.

Having arrived home Camille had but one thought; all of her gestures and means of expression were employed to convey to her uncle that she wanted above all a slate and pencil. The goodman Giraud was not at all surprised at this request, although it was made to him a little late. He hurried to his room and confident that he had understood her, he brought back in triumph to his niece a little board and a piece of chalk, relics of his old business of building and carpentry.

Camille appeared to be delighted at having her desires gratified in this way. She placed the board upon her lap, and persuaded her uncle to sit down beside her; then she handed him the chalk, and took his hand as if to guide it, at the same time that her anxious eyes followed his movements.

Uncle Giraud well understood that she desired him to write something, but what? He did not know. " Is it your mother's name? Is it mine? Is it yours, you wish? " and to better explain himself, he pointed with his finger at the young girl. She nodded her head at once, and in large letters he wrote the name " Camille "; after which, satisfied with himself and with the manner in which

he had spent the evening, supper being ready, he sat down at the table, without waiting for his niece, who was too tired to sit in her accustomed place at the head of the table.

Camille never retired before her uncle had finished his bottle. She watched him eat his supper, said good night, and then retired to her room, with her little board under her arm.

As soon as her door was locked, she attempted to write. Relieved of her petticoats and with her hair down, she began to copy, with great care and pains, the word which her uncle had just written, and to scrawl, with the chalk, all over a large table which stood in the middle of the room. After more than one attempt and several erasures she managed, fairly well, to reproduce the letters she had before her eyes. When it was finished, to assure herself of the correctness of her copy, she counted one by one the letters that had served her as models; she then walked around the table, her heart throbbing with joy as if she had gained a glorious victory. That word "Camille," which she had just written, appeared admirable to her, and should certainly express to her the most beautiful thing in the world. In this one word she seemed to see a multitude of thoughts, each one sweeter, more mysterious, and more charming than the other. She did not understand that it was only her own name.

It was July; the air was pure and the nights superb. Camille had opened her window; she stood before it, and from time to time, dreaming, her hair falling over her shoulders, her arms crossed, her eyes sparkling, and beautiful with that pallor which the clearness of night gives to a woman, she looked out upon one of the most dismal sights that can be imagined—the narrow court of a long building occupied by a stage-coach company. In this court, cold, humid, and unhealthy, no ray of sunlight had ever penetrated; the height of the structure, rising one floor above another, obscured this sort of cavern from the light.

Four or five large coaches, crowded together in a shed, seemed to offer themselves to who ever wished to enter. Two or three others, left in the court for lack of space, seemed to be awaiting the horses, whose noise in the stable served as their demand for hay continuously. Over a gate carefully closed at midnight to the tenants, but always ready to open noisily at any hour at the crack of a coachman's whip, heavy walls reared up, pierced with some fifty casements, behind which, after ten o'clock, no candle ever shone unless under extraordinary circumstances.

Camille was about to leave her window, when suddenly, in the shadow cast by a heavy coach, she seemed to see a human form moving, handsomely attired and walking slowly. A thrill

of fear came over Camille at first without her comprehending why, for her uncle was near, and the presence of the goodman was revealed by his noisy slumber; besides, what thief or assassin would come and walk in that court in such a costume as the man was dressed in?

However, the man was there, and Camille could see him. He was walking behind the coaches, watching the window at which she stood. After some moments Camille felt her courage returning. She took the candle, and stretching her arm out of the window, suddenly lit up the court; at the same time she glanced down, half-frightened, half-threatening. The shadow of the coach was gone, and the Marquis de Maubray —for it was he—seeing that he was completely discovered, fell upon his knees, and clasped his hands as he gazed at Camille in an attitude of the most profound respect.

They remained thus for a few moments, Camille at the window holding the candle and the marquis on his knees before her. If Romeo and Juliet, who had only seen each other one night at a masked ball, at their first meeting, could exchange so many vows, which were faithfully kept, let us imagine what might be the first gestures and glances of two lovers who could only tell each other by their actions, those same things, eternal before God, and which the genius of Shakespeare has immortalized on earth.

It certainly must appear ridiculous to mount two or three steps in order to climb to the top of a carriage, stopping, at each effort one is obliged to make, to inquire if one may continue. It is true that a man in silk hose and embroidered waistcoat runs the risks of a bad appearance when it is a question of jumping from the top of a carriage to the ledge of a window. All this is incontestable, unless one is in love.

When the Marquis de Maubray reached Camille's room he began by saluting her as ceremoniously as if he had been in the Tuileries. If he had been able to speak, perhaps he would have told her how he had escaped the vigilance of his tutor; by means of bribing a lackey had been allowed to pass the night beneath her window; how he had followed her when she left the opera; how a glance from her had changed his whole life; and, finally, how he loved only her in the world, and wished for no greater happiness than to offer her his hand and fortune. All this was expressed in his gestures; but Camille's bow, in return for his salutation, made him understand how useless such a recital would have been, and that it mattered little to her to know how he had managed to reach her, inasmuch as he was there.

The Marquis de Maubray, in spite of a certain audacity of which he had given proof in intruding upon the privacy of her he loved, was, as I have said, simple and reserved. After having

saluted Camille, he vainly sought a way of asking her if she would accept him as her husband. She understood nothing of what he was attempting to explain. He saw on the table the board on which was written the name "Camille." He seized a piece of chalk, and by the side of this name he wrote his name, "Pierre."

"What is the meaning of all this?" exclaimed a deep bass voice. "Who ever heard of such a meeting? How did you get in here, monsieur? What are you doing in this room?"

It was Uncle Giraud who spoke thus, entering in his dressing-gown, with a furious air.

"This is a fine thing!" he continued. "God knows I was sleeping, but if you made any noise, it was not with your lips. What sort of being are you that you find nothing easier to do than climb up this wall? What is your intention? To spoil a carriage, break everything, make havoc, and after that, what? To dishonor a family! To throw shame and infamy upon honest people."

"This one does not hear me either!" cried Uncle Giraud disconsolately.

But the marquis took a pencil and a piece of paper, and wrote this note:

"I love Mademoiselle Camille and wish to marry her. I have an income of twenty thousand livres. Will you give her to me?"

"It is only people who do not speak who can finish their business so quickly," said Uncle Giraud. "But," he cried after a moment's reflection, "I am not her father, I am only her uncle. You must ask her father's permission."

IX

It was not an easy undertaking to obtain the chevalier's consent to such a marriage. Not that he was not disposed, as we have seen, to do all that was possible to make his daughter's life more cheerful, but in the present circumstances there was an almost insurmountable difficulty. It was a question of uniting a woman afflicted with a terrible infirmity to a man stricken with the same misfortune; and if such a union was to bear fruit, it was probable that it would only bring one more unfortunate into the world.

The chevalier, having returned to his home, always a prey to the deepest grief, continued to live in solitude. Madame des Arcis had been buried in the park; a few weeping willows surrounded her tomb, and from afar indicated to passers-by the modest place where she reposed. It was toward this place that the chevalier directed his footsteps every day. There he spent long hours, with remorse and sadness, and giving way to all the memories that could nourish his grief.

It was there that Uncle Giraud came suddenly upon him one morning. The day after he had surprised the two lovers together the goodman had left Paris with his niece, had brought Camille back to Le Mans, and had left her in his own house, there to await the result of the course he was about to take.

Pierre, having been informed of this journey, had promised to be faithful and to remain ready to keep his word. An orphan for a long time, master of his own fortune, needing only his tutor's aid in conversing, his wish had no obstacle to fear. The goodman was quite willing to act as a mediator and to try and consummate the marriage of the two young people, but he did not intend that their first interview, which seemed to him somewhat strange, should be renewed without the permission of the father and the notary.

As may well be imagined, the chevalier showed extreme astonishment at Uncle Giraud's words. When the goodman started to relate that meeting at the opera, that strange scene, and still more peculiar proposal, he found it difficult to conceive that such a romance was possible. Forced, however, to recognize that he was being spoken to seriously, the objections presented themselves at once to his mind.

"What do you wish?" said he to Uncle Giraud—"to unite two beings equally unfortunate? Is it not enough to have in our family that poor

afflicted creature of whom I am the father? Must we add to our misfortune by giving her a husband similar to herself? Am I destined to see myself surrounded by beings shunned by the world, objects of scorn and pity? Must I pass my life with mutes, grow old amid their awful silence, and have my eyes closed by their hands? My name, of which, God knows, I am not vain, but which, however, is that of my father, am I to leave it to unfortuntes who can neither sign nor pronounce it?"

"Not pronounce it," said Uncle Giraud, "but sign it; that is another matter."

"Sign it!" cried the chevalier. "Have you lost your reason?"

"I know what I am talking about, and that young man knows how to write," answered the uncle. "I bear witness and can testify that he even writes very well and readily, as his proposal, which I have in my pocket, and which is very frank, can prove."

At the same time the goodman showed the chevalier the paper on which the Marquis de Maubray had written those few words which expressed, somewhat laconically it is true, but clearly, the object of his desires.

"What does this mean?" said the father. "Since when can the deaf-mutes use a pen? What story are you telling me, Giraud?"

"My faith," said Uncle Giraud, "I do not

know what to make of it, nor how such a thing can be possible. The truth is, that my intention was just to amuse Camille, and to see also myself the ballet at the opera. This little marquis happened to be there, and it is certain that he had a slate and a pencil, which he used very skilfully. I had always thought, like you, that when one was dumb it followed one could say nothing; but it is nothing of the sort. It seems that they have recently made a discovery by means of which all these people understand each other, and converse together to their entire satisfaction. They say that it is an abbé, whose name I do not know, who invented this method. As for me, you will understand that a slate has never appeared of any other use than for roofing purposes; but these Parisians are so ingenious!"

"Are you serious in what you say?"

"Very serious. This little marquis is rich, and a good fellow; he is a gentleman and a gallant man; I will answer for him. Remember one thing, I beg of you: what will you do with that poor Camille? She does not speak, it is true, but that is not her fault. What do you wish her to become? She can not always remain a girl. Here is a man who loves her; that man, if you give her to him, will never be impatient with her on account of the fault she has at the end of her tongue; he knows what it is from his own experience. They understand each other, these

children; they comprehend, without having any need to shout. The little marquis knows how to read and write; Camille will learn to do the same; it will not be any more difficult for her than for him. You fully understand that if I was proposing to marry your daughter to a blind man, you would be quite right to laugh in my face; but I propose a deaf-mute, which is reasonable. You see that during the sixteen years that this little one has been yours you have never been reconciled to her. How can you expect a man, made like every one else, can arrange matters if you, who are her father, can not take your part?"

While the uncle was speaking, the chevalier from time to time glanced toward his wife's tomb, and seemed to be reflecting deeply:

"To give to my daughter the use of her intellect!" said he, after a long pause; "will God permit it? Is it possible?"

At this moment the curé of a neighboring village entered the garden, coming to dine at the house. The chevalier casually greeted him, then, suddenly emerging from his reverie:

"Abbé," said he, "you sometimes know the latest news, and you receive the papers. Have you heard of a priest who has undertaken to educate deaf-mutes?"

Unfortunately, the person to whom this question was addressed was a typical country curé of

the time, simple and good, but very ignorant, and sharing all the prejudices of a century in which there were so many and such fatal ones.

"I do not know what monseigneur means," he answered, addressing the chevalier as the seigneur of the village, "unless he is speaking of the Abbé de l'Épée."

"Exactly!" said Uncle Giraud. "That is the name I heard; I no longer remembered it."

"Well," said the chevalier, "what can we believe?"

"I can not," answered the curé, "speak with too much caution on a matter with which I can not claim as yet to be fully conversant. But I am led to believe, from what little evidence I have been able to gather on the subject, that this Monsieur de l'Épée, who appears, moreover, to be a very venerable person, has achieved the success he expected."

"What do you mean by that?" said Uncle Giraud.

"I mean," said the priest, "that the best intention may sometimes fail in the result. There is no doubt, from what I have heard, that the most praiseworthy efforts have been made; but I have every reason to believe that the pretension of teaching deaf-mutes to read, as monseigneur says, is altogether chimerical."

"I have seen it with my own eyes," said Uncle Giraud. "I have seen a deaf-mute writing."

"I do not wish to contradict you in any way," answered the curé, "but learned and distinguished men, among whom I might mention doctors from the Faculty of Paris, have assured me in the most emphatic manner that such a thing was impossible."

"A thing one sees can not be impossible," replied the goodman impatiently. "I have come fifty leagues with a note in my pocket to show it to the chevalier; here it is. It is as plain as daylight."

Speaking thus, the old master mason had once more brought forth his paper and had placed it before the curé's eyes. The latter, half-astonished, half-annoyed, examined the letter, turned it over, read it aloud several times, and returned it to the uncle, hardly knowing what to say.

The chevalier had not appeared to heed the discussion; he continued to walk in silence, and his uncertainty increased each moment.

"If Giraud is right," he thought, "and if I refuse, I am not doing my duty; it is almost a crime. An occasion presents itself whereby that poor girl, to whom I have given only the semblance of life, may find a hand that reaches out for hers in the darkness by which she is surrounded. Without emerging from that night in which she will always be enveloped, she can dream that she is happy. By what right shall

I oppose this? What would her mother say if she were here? "

The chevalier's eyes were again directed toward the tomb; then he took Uncle Giraud by the arm, stepped aside, and said in a low voice: "Do what you wish."

"That is right," said the uncle; "I will go and find her and bring her here. She is at my house. We will return together shortly."

"Never!" answered the father. "Let us endeavor to make her happy; but see her again I can not."

Pierre and Camille were married in Paris, at the Church of the Petits-Pères. The tutor and the uncle were the sole witnesses. When the officiating priest addressed them in the usual form, Pierre, who had learned to know when he should bend his head as a sign of consent, acquitted himself very well, in a rôle which was, moreover, difficult to perform. Camille did not attempt to understand anything; she looked at her husband, and bowed her head as he did.

They had only seen each other to fall in love, and that was sufficient, one might say. When they left the church arm in arm they were hardly acquainted. The marquis had a large mansion. Camille, after mass, stepped into a brilliant equipage, which she examined with childlike curiosity.

The home to which she was taken was no less

a subject of astonishment. The rooms, the horses, the servants, which were all to be hers, seemed to her a marvel. It had been arranged that this marriage should be celebrated quietly; a very simple supper after the ceremony completed the festivities.

X

Camille became a mother. One day, when the chevalier was walking in the park, a servant brought him a letter written in an unknown hand, and in which was apparently a singular mixture of distinction and ignorance. It came from Camille, and was as follows:

"O my father! I speak, not with my lips, but with my hand. My mouth is forever sealed, yet I can converse. He who is my master has taught me to write. He had me taught like himself, by the same teacher who instructed him, for you know he was dumb like me, for a long time. I found it very hard to learn. He taught me, at first, to converse with my fingers, and then with written letters. There are all kinds of characters, expressing fear, anger, and everything else. It takes a long time to learn it well, and still longer to form words, on account of the letters which are more difficult, but at length it

is accomplished, as you see. The Abbé de l'Épée is a very good and gentle man, the same as Father Vanin of the Christian Doctrine.

"I have a very beautiful child. I hardly dare allude to him before knowing if he is to be like us, but I can not resist the pleasure of writing to you, in spite of our great concern, for you may well understand that my husband and I are very anxious, especially because we can not hear. The nurse hears well, but we are afraid she may be mistaken; thus we wait with great impatience to see if he will open his lips and move them, making the sounds of those who hear and speak. You may well imagine we have consulted doctors to know if it is possible that the child of two people as unfortunate as we are should not be mute also, and they have told us that such a thing is possible; but we dare not believe it.

"Judge with what fear we watch this poor child all the time, and how embarrassed we are when he opens his little lips and we can not tell if they make a noise or not. Be assured, my father, that I often think of my mother, for she must have been as anxious about me as I am now, myself. You loved me well, as I also love my child; but I have been only a cause of sorrow to you. Now that I can read and write, I understand how my mother must have suffered.

"If you desire to please me, dear father, you will come and see us in Paris. It would be

an occasion of joy and gratitude for your respectful daughter.

"CAMILLE."

After reading this letter the chevalier hesitated for some time. At first he could hardly believe his eyes and be convinced that it was Camille herself who had written to him, but he finally succumbed before such evidence. What should he do? If he yielded to his daughter and went to Paris, he exposed himself to a new sorrow, and all the memories of an old one. A child whom he did not know, it is true, but who was nevertheless the son of his daughter, might recall his past sufferings. Camille might remind him of Cécile, yet he could not resist joining in the anxiety of that young mother awaiting a word from her child's lips.

"You must go," said Uncle Giraud when the chevalier consulted him. "It is I who effected that marriage, and I hold it good and durable. Will you abandon your own flesh and blood in time of trouble? Was it not enough—and I say it without reproach—to have neglected your wife at the children's party, in consequence of which she was drowned? Will you also desert this little one? Do you think to be sad is ample repentance? You are that, I admit, and even more so than is reasonable; but do you not think there are other things to do in the world? She asks

you to go; let us start. I shall go with you, but I have only one regret, and that is that she did not invite me also. It was unkind of her not to have knocked at my door, which has always been open to her."

"He is right," thought the chevalier. "I made one of the best of wives suffer unnecessarily and cruelly. I left her to die a fearful death, when I should have saved her from it. If I must be punished to-day by the sight of my daughter's misfortune, I ought not to complain; however painful this spectacle may be to me, I should court it and condemn myself to it. This chastisement is due to me. Let the daughter punish me for having deserted the mother. I will go to Paris and see this child. I have forsaken those I loved, and have removed myself from calamity; I wish now to feel a bitter pleasure in contemplating it."

In a pretty, wainscoted boudoir, on the entresol of a fine house situated in the Faubourg Saint Germain, were seated the young wife and her husband when the father and uncle arrived. On a table were sketches, books, and engravings. The husband was reading, the wife embroidering, and the child playing on the carpet.

The marquis arose. Camille ran to her father, who kissed her tenderly, and could not restrain a few tears; but the eyes of the chevalier were immediately fixed upon the child. In spite of

himself, the horror that he had formerly felt over the affliction of Camille, again came back to him at the sight of the child who was about to inherit the malediction that he had bequeathed to him. He recoiled when they presented the child to him.

"Another mute!" he cried.

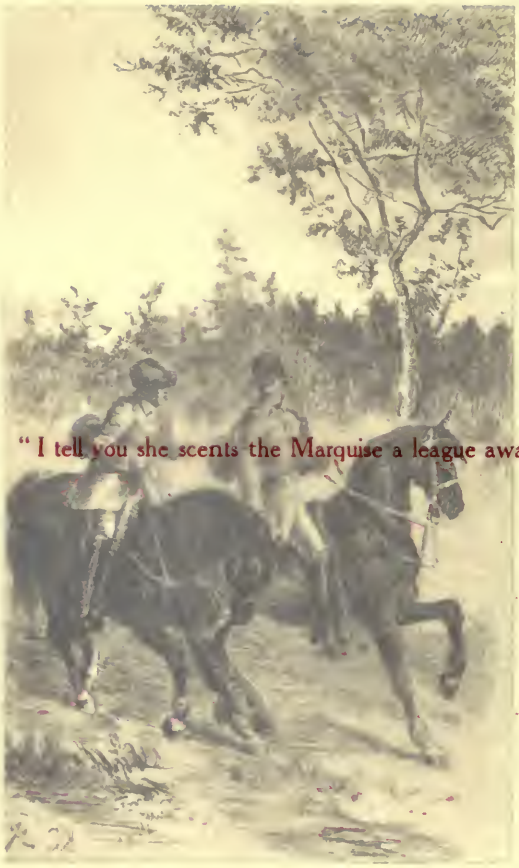
Camille took her son in her arms; although not hearing, she understood. Slowly raising the child before the chevalier, she placed her finger on his little lips, rubbing them gently as if to invite him to speak. The child permitted himself to be entreated for a few moments, then pronounced very distinctly these two words, which the mother had already taught him:

"Good morning, papa!"

"Now you see clearly that God pardons all, and always," said Uncle Giraud.

THE SECRET OF JAVOTTE

One day in the autumn of last year, toward eight in the evening, two young men were returning from the hunt, following on horseback the road to Noisy, some distance from Luzarches. Behind them walked a huntsman leading the hounds. The sun was setting and in the distance was gilding the beautiful forest of Carenelle, where the late Duc de Bourbon loved to hunt. While the younger of the two cavaliers, who was about twenty-five years of age, trotted gaily along, and amused himself by jumping the hedges, the other appeared absent-minded and pre-occupied. Sometimes he would excite his horse, striking it impatiently, sometimes he would suddenly stop and remain behind, as if absorbed in thought. He hardly answered the cheerful remarks of his companion, who, on his part, jeered at his silence. In a word, he seemed given up to that strange reverie common to scholars and lovers, who are rarely where they appear to be. Arriving at a cross-road, he dismounted, and, advancing to the edge of a ditch, picked up a small branch of willow which was somewhat deeply imbedded in the sand. From this branch



"I tell you she scents the Marquise a league away."

THE SECRET OF JAVOTTE

One day in the autumn of last year, toward eight in the evening, two young men were returning from the hunt, following on horseback the road to Noisy, some distance from Luzarches. Behind them walked a huntsman leading the hounds. The sun was setting and in the distance was gilding the beautiful forest of Carenelle, where the late Duc de Bourbon loved to hunt. While the younger of the two cavaliers, who was about twenty-five years of age, trotted gaily along, and amused himself by jumping the hedges, the other appeared absent-minded and pre-occupied. Sometimes he would excite his horse, striking it impatiently, sometimes he would suddenly stop and remain behind, as if absorbed in thought. He hardly answered the cheerful remarks of his companion, who, on his part, jeered at his silence. In a word, he seemed given up to that strange reverie common to scholars and lovers, who are rarely where they appear to be. Arriving at a cross-road, he dismounted, and, advancing to the edge of a ditch, picked up a small branch of willow which was somewhat deeply imbedded in the sand. From this branch

he plucked a leaf, and, without being noticed, furtively slipped it into his bosom; then remounting at once, he said to the huntsman:

"Pierre, go to Clignets by the village; my brother and I will return by the warren, for I notice that to-day Gitana is none too gentle; she will play me some trick in the hollow road, if we meet a herd of cattle returning to the farm."

The huntsman obeyed and, with his dogs, followed a path among the rocks. Observing this, young Armand de Berville (such was the name of the younger of the two brothers) burst into loud laughter:

"Parbleu!" said he, "my dear Tristan, you are admirably prudent to-night. Are you not afraid that Gitana may be devoured by a lamb? But you are right; I will make a wager that, in spite of all your precautions, the poor beast, usually so quiet, will play you some trick within half an hour."

"Why so?" remanded Tristan in a brief and almost irritated manner.

"Why, apparently," answered Armand drawing nearer to his brother, "because we are going to pass in front of the Avenue de Renonval, and your mare is sure to prance when she sees the railing. Happily," he added, laughing heartily, "Madame de Vernage is there, and you will find a place laid for you at table, if Gitana breaks your leg."

"What can stop your foolish jests?" said Tristan, laughing in his turn somewhat against his will.

"I am not joking at all," answered Armand; "and what harm is there in that? She is sensible, this marquise; she loves the braid on an uniform; it suits her age. Have you not the honor of serving the king in the Black Hussars Regiment? If, on the other hand, she also is fond of hunting, and if she finds that your horn looks well in the sun, on your red coat, is that a mortal sin?"

"Listen, madcap," said Tristan. "Joke like this, between ourselves, as much as you please, but think seriously of what you say when a third person is present. Madame de Vernage is our mother's friend; her house is one of the only resources that we have in the country to divert ourselves, in this monotonous life which amuses you, a briefless barrister, but which would kill me if I led it for long. The marquise is almost the only woman among our few acquaintances . . .

"The most agreeable," added Armand.

"Whatever you like. You are not sorry yourself to go to Renonval, whenever we are invited. It would not be very sensible on our part to break with these people, and that is what your talk will finish by doing, if you continue to chatter at hazard. You know well enough that I

have no more pretension of pleasing Madame de Vernage than any other . . ."

"Be careful with Gitana!" cried Armand. "See how she pricks up her ears! I tell you she scents the marquise a league away."

"A truce to your jokes. Remember what I tell you, and try to think of it seriously."

"I think," said Armand, "and very seriously, that the marquise looks very well in flat sleeves, and that black becomes her to perfection."

"What are you talking about?"

"About sleeves. Do you imagine one sees nothing in this world? The other day, while chatting in the boat, did I not hear you very clearly say that black was your color, and was not this good marquise, on hearing this, gracious enough to retire to her room, on her return, and to gallantly descend again clothed in the blackest of all her gowns?"

"What is there astonishing in that? Is it not the custom to change one's dress for dinner?"

"Be careful with Gitana, I tell you! She is capable of running away and leading you straight to the stables of Renonval, in spite of yourself. And last week at the fête, did not this same marquise, always in black, think it quite natural to instal me in the great coach, with my dog and monsieur le curé, and to climb into your tilbury, at the risk of showing her leg?"

"What does that prove? One of us had to undertake the task."

"Yes, it is but one; it is always I. I do not complain; I am not jealous; but not later than yesterday, at the hunt meeting, did she not think proper to leave her carriage and to appropriate my mount, which I gave to her with admirable disinterestedness, that she might go for a gallop in the woods by the side of monsieur the officer? Grumble at me, I am your providence. Instead of hiding behind these denials, you owe it to me, honestly speaking, to confide your secrets to me."

"What confidence can you expect any one to have in such a madcap as you are, and what secrets do you want me to tell you, if there is no truth in your tales?"

"Be careful with Gitana, my brother!"

"You make me impatient with your refrain. And if it is true that I have taken a fancy to pay a visit to Renonval to-night, what is there extraordinary in that? Do I need some pretext to beg you to accompany me to the house, or do you wish to return alone?"

"Certainly not; likewise, if we happened to meet Madame de Vernage walking in front of her avenue, there would be nothing surprising in that. The road you are taking us over is much the longer, it is true; but what is a quarter of an hour more or less in comparison with eternity? The marquise must have heard us

blowing our horns; it will only be natural that she should take a breath of fresh air in company with her inevitable admirer and neighbor, Monsieur de La Bretonnière."

"I acknowledge," said Tristan, much relieved at changing the subject, "that this M. de La Bretonnière annoys me extremely. I can not conceive how such a brilliant woman can allow herself to be monopolized by a fool, and carry such a shadow with her everywhere."

"It is certain," answered Armand, "that that person is heavy and crude. He is a true country squire, in the full sense of the word, created and placed in the world to fill the rôle of neighbor. To visit his neighbors is his lot; it is even almost a science with him, for he visits as no one else does. Never have I seen a man so at home as he is away from his own domicile. If one dines with Madame de Vernage, he is at the foot of the table in the midst of the children. He whispers to the governess, and helps the little one to soup; and you will notice that he is not an ordinary and classic sponger, who feels himself obliged to laugh if the hostess makes a joke; he would rather be disposed, if he dared, to find fault with and thwart everything. If a picnic in the country is mentioned, he never fails to remark that the barometer indicates a change in the weather. If some one tells a story or speaks of some curiosity, he has seen something better;

but he does not deign to say what it was, and is content to toss his head with modesty enough to make you box his ears. A tiresome creature! In truth, I do not know if it is possible to chat with Madame de Vernage for a quarter of an hour at a time, when he is present, without his anxious and startling physiognomy intervening between her and you. He is certainly not handsome, and lacks brains; three-quarters of the time he does not say a word, and by a special favor of Providence he finds in silence a means of being more annoying than a chatterbox, if only in the way he watches the others speaking. But what is that to him! He does not live; he he exists, and attempts to embarrass, discourage, and render impatient those who do live. Notwithstanding, the marquise can endure him; she is charitable enough to listen to him and to encourage him. I really believe that she loves him, and that she will never rid herself of him."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Tristan, somewhat troubled at this word *never*. "Do you think that one can like such a being?"

"Not with love," answered Armand, with an air of jesting indifference. "Still, this poor man is not a monster. He is a bachelor, and very comfortable. He has, like ourselves, a small castle with a small moat and a large old coach. Above all, in the marquise's eyes he possesses that incomparable advantage that is given by

a habit of ten years' duration and an obsession of every day. A newcomer, an officer on furlough, allow me to whisper in your ear, may dazzle and please for a time; but he who is present every day holds the trump cards."

While the two brothers were talking together in this manner, they had emerged from the woods and started to enter the vineyards. Already they perceived, on the hillside, the clock-tower of the village of Renonval.

"Madame de Vernage," continued Armand, "has a hundred good qualities, but she is a coquette. She passes for a devout woman, and has a little consecrated chapel attached to her house; but she is quite fond of pretty speeches. Do not be angry, but, to my mind, she is a woman hard to understand and somewhat dangerous."

"That is possible," said Tristan.

"And even probable," answered his brother. "I am not sorry you agree with me, and in turn I will willingly say, Let us speak seriously. I have had a long time in which to know you and study you closely. You come here for a few days; you are young and handsome, she is beautiful and ingenious; you do not know what to do, she pleases you, you tell her so, and she lets you talk. I, who see her in winter as in summer, in Paris as in the country, I am less confident, and she knows it well; that is why she takes my horse and leaves me to a tête-à-tête with

the curé. Her large black eyes, which she lowers with such severe modesty at times, know how to raise themselves toward you, I am quite sure, when you ride through the forest, and I can understand that this woman has many charms. To my knowledge she has turned the heads of three or four poor fellows who have almost lost their reason. But shall I express my thoughts? In the words of Scudéry, one may penetrate easily to the antechamber of her heart, but the apartment itself is always closed, perhaps because it is empty."

"If you were not mistaken," said Tristan, "her character would be none too good."

"Not from her point of view; but what have you to reproach her with? Is it her fault if one falls in love with her? Although she is hardly over thirty, she informs whoever cares to listen, that since she became a widow she has given up the pleasure of the world, that she wishes to live peacefully at home, ride horseback, and pray to God. She gives alms, and goes to confession; now, every woman who has a confessor, if she is not sincerely and veritably religious, is the worst kind of a coquette that civilization has produced. Such a woman, sure of herself, still beautiful, and profiting by the privileges of her beauty, knows how to incessantly settle, not with her conscience, but with her approaching confession. At the very moment

when she seems to give herself up with the most charming abandonment to the cajolery that she loves, she looks to see if the tip of her foot is sufficiently hidden beneath her gown, and calculates the place on her hand upon which may be implanted, without sin, a kiss. What for, you say? If she lacks faith, why not be frankly a coquette? If she thinks, why expose herself to the temptation? Because she braves it and it amuses her. And, in fact, it is impossible to tell if she is sincere or a hypocrite; this is her idiosyncracy, yet she pleases; her victims pass by and disappear. La Bretonnière the silent will probably remain, to the day of his death, on the threshold of the temple where this sphinx, with her large eyes, delivers the oracle and inhales the incense."

While his brother was speaking, Tristan had stopped his horse. The railings of the Castle of Renonval were but a hundred paces away. Before this railing, as Armand had foreseen, Madame de Vernage was walking on the lawn, but, contrary to custom, she was alone. The expression of Tristan's face suddenly altered.

"Listen, Armand," said he; "I acknowledge that I love her. You are a man and possess a heart; you know, just as well as I do, that passion knows neither law nor advice. You are not the first who has spoken of her in this manner to me. I have been told all that, but can not

believe any of it. I am subjugated by this woman; she is so charming, so amiable, so bewitching, when she wishes . . ."

"I know it very well," said Armand.

"No," cried Tristan, "I can not think that with so much grace, so much sweetness and so much piety—for indeed she gives alms, as you say, and does her duty—I can not, I will not believe that with all the appearance of frankness and goodness, she can be such as you imagine. But it is of no moment. I was seeking a motive for leaving you on the way, and remaining alone; I prefer to trust to your word. I am going to Renonval. Return to Les Clignets. If our good mother is anxious at not seeing me with you, you can tell her that I lost the hunt, that my horse is sick, or whatever you like. I will only make a short visit, and will return almost at once."

"Why this mystery, if this is the case?"

"Because the marquise herself recognizes that it is the wisest course to pursue. The country people are chatterers, idiots, and as meddlesome as three small towns together. Keep my secret. I will see you to-night."

Without awaiting any reply, Tristan galloped away. Left alone, Armand changed his course, and took a short cut that led him home much quicker. It was not, as one may well imagine, without displeasure and with a kind of fear that

he saw his brother disappearing. Young in years, but already matured by the precocious experience of the world, Armand de Berville, often apparently heedless, possessed a deal of common sense. While Tristan, a distinguished army officer, ran the risks of war in Algeria, and at times gave way to the dangerous flights of a vivid and passionate imagination, Armand remained at home and kept his old mother company. Tristan at times laughed at his sedentary tastes, and nicknamed him Monsieur l'Abbé, pretending that, without the Revolution, he would have taken holy orders, in his quality as a younger son; but this did not annoy him.

"Look after your title," he answered, "but give me a living."

The baronne de Berville, the mother, for a long time a widow, lived in the Marais in winter, and on the little estate of Les Clignets in the summer. The family was not wealthy enough to keep up a large establishment; but as the young men were fond of hunting, and the baronne adored her children, fox hounds had been brought from England. Some neighbors had followed this example; these small packs united were the means of tolerably good hunts in the woods that surrounded the forest of Carenelle. In this way friendly and almost intimate relations had been established between the inhabitants of Les Clignets and those of two or three houses

in the neighborhood. Madame de Vernage, as we have just seen, was the queen of the canton. From the Sieur de Franconville and the magistrate of Beauvais to the somewhat backward but elegant de Luzarches, all rendered homage to the beautiful marquise, yes, even the curé of Noisy himself. Renonval was the rendezvous for what notables there were in the district of Pontoise. All were agreed in vaunting, like Tristan, the grace and the goodness of the chatelaine. No one resisted the sovereign empire she wielded, so is it said, over the hearts of all; and this was precisely why Armand was annoyed that his brother did not return to supper with him.

It was in no wise difficult for him to find an excuse to justify this absence, and to tell the baronne, on his return, that Tristan had stopped with a farmer, with whom he was negotiating the purchase of a plot of ground. Madame de Berville, who did not dine before nine o'clock when her children went hunting, so that they might take their meal together, wished to wait for her eldest son. Armand, dying of hunger and thirst, like any hunter who has done his duty, did not appear well satisfied at this delay that was imposed upon him. Perhaps he feared within himself that the visit to Renonval might be prolonged further than had been said. However this may be, to give himself a little patience, he first took an instalment of the dinner, then

went to look at his dogs and cast a master's glance at the stable, and returned to stretch himself on the sofa, already half asleep after the fatigue of the day.

Night had come, and a storm was brewing. Madame de Berville, seated, according to her custom, with her needlework, was regarding the clock, then the window, down which the rain was trickling. Half an hour slowly went by, and anxiety soon came.

"What can your brother be doing?" said the baronne, "it is impossible that in this weather and at this hour he should stop so long on the way; some accident must have happened to him. I will send some one to meet him."

"It is useless," answered Armand. "I swear that he is just as well as we are, and perhaps better, for, seeing this rain, he had doubtless ordered his supper at some inn at Noisy, while we are waiting for him."

The storm increased in violence and time was passing. Weary of waiting, they ordered the dinner; but they were sad and silent. Armand reproached himself for leaving his mother in a state of cruel uncertainty, which to him seemed useless; but he had given his word. On her side, Madame de Berville easily perceived on her son's face the anxiety that agitated him. She could not divine the cause of it, but the effect did not escape her. Accustomed to all the tenderness

and even to the confidence of Armand, she felt that if he was silent it was because he was obliged to be. For what reason? She did not know, but respected this reserve, at the same time unable to prevent herself from suffering. She raised her eyes to him with a plaintive and almost supplicating look, then listened to the thunder, and sighing, shrugged her shoulders. In spite of herself, her hands trembled with the effort she made to appear calm. As the hour advanced, Armand felt less and less the courage to keep his promise. Dinner over, he dared not rise; the mother and son remained for a long time alone leaning on the table, from which the dinner had been removed, understanding each other without opening their lips.

Toward eleven o'clock the baronne's maid appeared with the candles. Madame de Berville wished her son good night, and retired to her room to say her prayers as usual.

"And what, as a matter of fact, is the mad fellow doing?" said Armand to himself, while divesting himself of his hunting attire and preparing to go to bed. "Nothing to be anxious about, at any rate. He is expressing to Madame de Vernage with his eyes, that which the presence of La Bretonnière prevents him from saying otherwise. Is this quite certain? It seems to me that at this hour La Bretonnière must be in his coach, on his way home to bed. It is true that

Tristan also maybe on his way back, but I doubt it; the road is not good, and it is raining almost too hard for him to ride. On the other hand, they have excellent beds at Renonval, and so polite a marquise may certainly offer an asylum to a captain surprised by the storm. It is probable, all things considered, that Tristan will not return before to-morrow. That is annoying, for two reasons: first of all, this causes our mother anxiety; and then, finding shelter at a neighbor's is always dangerous. There is nothing that one should counsel less than a night spent beneath the roof of a pretty woman, and one never sleeps well in the house of those one dreams of. Sometimes one does not even sleep at all. What will happen to Tristan if he really falls in love with this coquette? He has heart enough for two, but so much the worse. She will find it easy to make game of him, too easy, perhaps, and there lies my hope. She will disdain to act falsely toward such a loyal character. But after all," continued Armand, blowing out his candle, " let him return when he likes; he is handsome and brave; he got out of it at Constantine, and will get out of it at Renonval."

The household had been asleep for a long time, and silence reigned in the country, when the noise of a horse's hoofs made itself heard on the road. It was two in the morning; an imperious voice called out for the door to be opened, and while

the stable-boy was removing, one after the other, the heavy iron bars that held the great gate in place, the dogs, according to their custom, set to uttering deep growls. Armand, who was sound asleep, awakened with a start, suddenly saw before him his brother carrying a torch, and enveloped in a mantle dripping with water.

"Have you just returned?" said he; "it is very late, or very early in the morning."

Tristan approached him, grasped his hand, and with the accent of an almost furious anger, said:

"You were right; she is the last of women, and I shall never see her again."

After which he bruskly departed.

II

Despite all Armand's questions, all his entreaties, Tristan refused to give his brother any explanation of those strange words that he had spoken on his return. The following day he announced to his mother that business compelled him to go to Paris for a few days, and gave all necessary orders. He intended to leave that very night.

"You must acknowledge," said Armand, "that your way with me is rather free and easy. First a half-way confidence, and then, at any

moment, off you go with the rest of your secret. What do you mean me to think of this impromptu disappearance?'

"Whatever you choose," was Tristan's answer, given with so calm an indifference that it seemed unalloyed with affectation. "You will accomplish nothing except to waste the pains you take. I had a fit of anger, true enough, and all about a mere trifle, offended vanity, mere sulkiness, or anything you may be disposed to call it. La Bretonnière vexed me, the marquise was in bad temper, the storm put me out, I came home I do not know why, and talked to you without thinking what I was saying. I will, if you like, confess that there is some little coolness between her and myself, but when the moment comes you will see us friends as of old."

"That is all fair and fine," answered Armand, "but yesterday you were not speaking in riddles when you said, 'She is the last of women.' Mere spite will never account for that. You are concealing something that has happened."

"Well, what has happened to me, in your opinion?" asked Tristan.

At this interrogation Armand hung his head and remained dumb, for, under the circumstances, as soon as his brother refused to break silence, any supposition, and pleasantry, might easily inflict a wound.

Toward the middle of the day an open car-

riage entered the courtyard of Les Clignets. A little man, somewhat ungraceful, awkward-looking, and dressed in his Sunday clothes, immediately got out of the carriage, himself lowered the step and presented his hand to a beautiful woman, simply and tastefully attired. It was Madame de Vernage and La Bretonnière who had come to visit the baronne. While they were ascending the steps, where Madame de Berville came to receive them, Armand attentively observed his brother's face with no small surprise. But Tristan smilingly looked at him, as if to say "You see there is nothing new."

From the easy turn the conversation took, from the polite speeches, cold but without any restraint, that were exchanged between Tristan and the marquise, it did not, in fact, seem that anything extraordinary had happened the night before. The marquise brought for Madame de Berville, who was fond of birds, a robin's nest; La Bretonnière had it in his hat. They went down into the garden and inspected the aviary. La Bretonnière, of course, gave his arm to the baronne; the two young men remained near Madame de Vernage. She appeared more lively than usual; she walked at random from one side to the other regardless of the baronne's border of box, making herself a bouquet as she went on.

"Well, gentlemen," said she, "when shall we hunt?"

Armand waited to hear Tristan announce his departure. This he did in fact and in the calmest voice, but at the same time fixing on the marquise a penetrating and almost hard and offensive look. She appeared to take no notice, and did not even ask him when he expected to return.

"In that case," she continued, "Monsieur Armand, you will be the only representative of the Bervilles that we shall see at Renonval; for I suppose we shall see you. La Bretonnière says he has discovered, with the aid of my gamekeeper's glasses, a kind of wild pig to which a beard is as natural as feathers to a bird."

"Not at all," said La Bretonnière; "it is a kind of a Chinese sow, black in color, called a *tonkin*. When these animals leave the yard, and accustom themselves to living in the woods . . ."

"Yes," said the marquise, "they become savage, and, by dint of eating acorns, tusks grow at the end of their noses."

"That is a fact," answered La Bretonnière; "not, it is true, in the case of the first or even the second generation; but I am satisfied that it is so," he added with a satisfied air.

"Without doubt," continued Madame de Vernage; "and if a man ventured to do as the *tonkins* do, and installed himself in a forest, the re-

sult would be that his grandchildren would have horns on their heads. And that is what proves," she continued, tapping Tristan on the hand with her bouquet, " that one is very wrong to act the savage; it succeeds with no one."

" That is likewise true," said La Bretonnière, " to be a savage is a great fault."

" Yet it is better," answered Tristan, " than a certain kind of tameness."

La Bretonnière opened wide his eyes, hardly knowing whether he ought to be annoyed or not.

" Yes," said Madame de Berville to the marquise, " you are quite right. Scold this bad boy for me; he is always scouring the highways, and now he wants to leave us to-night to go to Paris. Forbid him to leave."

Madame de Vernage, who just before had not said a word to attempt to detain Tristan, seeing herself begged, in this manner, to do so, immediately brought into play all the insistence and all the good graces of which she was capable. She smiled most sweetly, and told Tristan that he was joking; that he had no business to attend to in Paris; that the curiosity of a hunt for *tonkins* ought to outweigh everything else; and, finally, that he was officially invited to breakfast the next day at Renonval.

Tristan answered each of these compliments by one of those slight salutations that are invented by people who hardly know what to say;

it was clear that his patience was cruelly tried. Madame de Vernage did not wait for the refusal she foresaw, and, as soon as she had finished speaking, turned away and occupied herself with other things, as if she had rehearsed a comedy and her rôle was finished.

"What is the meaning of all this?" Armand still asked himself. "Which one bears ill-will toward the other? Is it my brother? Is it La Bretonnière? What is the marquise doing here?"

The actions of Madame de Vernage were, in fact, hard to understand. Now she would show toward Tristan a marked coldness and indifference, now she appeared to treat him with more familiarity and coquetry than usual. "Break off that twig for me," she would say to him. "Find me some lilies of the valley. I have company to-night, and want to be all flowers. I intend to wear a botanical gown, and have a garden on my head."

Tristan obeyed; he had to. The marquise soon found herself with a veritable bunch of flowers, but none of them pleased her. "You are no connoisseur," she said; "you are a bad gardener; you break everything, and think you are doing well because you scratch your fingers. But it isn't that; you do not know how to choose."

While speaking thus, she stripped the leaves off the stems, then allowed them to fall to the ground, and pushed them aside with her feet

as she walked with that careless disdain which sometimes does such harm in the most innocent manner possible.

In the middle of the park there was a brook with a wooden bridge which was broken, but of which a few planks were still standing. La Bretonnière, according to his mania, declared that there was danger in risking oneself on it, and that they must return another way.

The marquise wished to pass, and commenced to walk ahead, when the baronne represented to her that she ran the risk of a serious fall.

"Bah!" said Madame de Vernage. "You slander your planks to do honor to the depth of your river; and if I do as Condé did, what then will happen?"

Intending to ride back, she carried a whip in her hand. She threw it to the other side of the water, to a little island. "Now, gentlemen," she continued, "there is my baton thrown down to the enemy. Which of you will go and get it."

"It is very imprudent," said La Bretonnière; "that whip is very fine; the head is beautifully carved."

"Will there, at any rate, be an honest reward?" asked Armand.

"Come now!" cried the marquise. "Dare you bargain with glory? And you, Sir Hussar," she added, turning toward Tristan, "what do you say? Will you cross?"

Tristan appeared to hesitate, not from fear of the danger or ridicule, but from a feeling of repugnance at seeing himself challenged in this manner for such a trifle. He frowned, and coldly replied:

"No, madame."

"Alas!" said Madame de Vernage, with a sigh, "if my poor Phanor were here, he would have returned me my whip long ago."

La Bretonnière, tapping the bridge with his cane, was contemplating it with an air of deep reflection; leaning nonchalantly on the broken beam which served as a railing, the marquise amused herself by making the planks bend, balancing herself above the water. Suddenly she darted away, crossed the bridge with charming alacrity and lightness, and started to run on the island. Armand had wished to precede her, but his brother seized him by the arm, and walking rapidly away, led him aside to the shelter of a hidden path. Here, as soon as the young men were alone, Tristan broke silence:

"My patience is exhausted. I hope you do not think me foolish enough to be annoyed by a joke; but this joke has a motive. Do you know what she came here for? She came to defy me, to play with my anger, and to see up to what point I would endure her audacity. She knows what she means by her cold-blooded quizzing. Miserable heart! Contemptible woman, who, in-

stead of respecting my silence and allowing me to keep away from her in peace, comes and displays her petty vanity here, and makes herself a sort of triumph out of a discretion which is not due to her!"

"Explain yourself," said Armand. "What is the matter?"

"You shall know all," replied Tristan, "for you also are interested, since you are my brother. Last night, while we were talking as we rode, and you were telling me so much that was bad about this woman, I dismounted at the crossroad to Roches. On the ground was a branch of willow, which you did not see me pick up. That branch of willow had been stuck in the sand by Madame de Vernage, when out for a walk in the morning. She was laughing just now at making me break down more from the trees; but that one had a meaning; it meant that the governess and the marquise's children had gone to her uncle's at Beaumont, that La Bretonnière was not coming to dinner, and that if I feared to wake people on leaving Renonval rather late, I could leave my horse with the goodman of Heloy."

"Parbleu!" said Armand. "All that in a sprig of willow!"

"Yes, and would to God I had kicked aside the sprig of willow as she has just done to our flowers. But I have told you, and you have

seen for yourself, that I loved her. I was under a spell. How strange! Yes, even yesterday I adored her; I was all love; I would have given my life's blood for her; and to-day . . ."

"Well, to-day?"

"Listen. For you to understand me, it is necessary that you should know, first of all, a little adventure that happened to me last year. You must know, then, that at the Opera ball I met a kind of grisette, a milliner, or something like it. I came to know her under somewhat peculiar circumstances. She was seated by my side, when Saint-Aubin, whom you know, came and said good evening to me. At the same moment, my neighbor, as if afraid, hid her head behind my shoulder. She whispered in my ear, begging me to help her and give my arm and walk through the lobby with her. I could hardly refuse. I rose with her and left Saint-Aubin. Thereupon she informed me that he was her lover; that she was afraid of him; that he was jealous; and, in fact, that she was hiding from him. In this way I suddenly found myself playing, in the eyes of Saint-Aubin, the rôle of a happy rival; for he had recognized his grisette and was following us with a discontented look upon his face. What can I say. It pleased me to take seriously this rôle that the fates offered me. I took the little girl to supper. Saint-Aubin, next day, came to me and wished to get

up a quarrel. I laughed in his face, and had no difficulty in bringing him to reason. He acknowledged with a good grace that it was hardly possible to cut one's throat for a young lady who took refuge at a masked ball to escape her lover's jealousy. Everything passed off as a joke, and the affair was forgotten. You see, there was not much harm done.

"Certainly not; there is nothing very serious in that. Here is what follows: Saint-Aubin, as you know, sometimes sees Madame de Vernage. He has been to Renonval. Now, last night, at the very moment when the marquise, seated near me, was listening, with her queenly look, to all the follies I was uttering, and was smilingly trying on this ring—which, thank Heaven, is still on my finger—do you know what she took upon herself to tell me? That she had heard this story of the ball, that she had from a reliable source, that Saint-Aubin adored this grisette, and, in despair at having lost her, had wished to avenge himself, had demanded satisfaction of me, and I had backed down and then . . ."

Tristan was unable to finish. For a few minutes the brothers walked in silence.

"What did you answer?" said Armand at length.

"I answered very plainly. I simply said to her. 'Madame la Marquise, a man that suffers

another man to raise his hand against him with impunity is called a coward, as you very well know. But the woman who, knowing this, or believing it, becomes the mistress of this coward, is also known by a name that it is useless for me to tell you.' Thereupon I took my hat and left."

"And did she not call you back?"

"Yes, indeed; at first she wished to treat it as a joke, and told me that I was angry at mere idle talk. Afterward she begged my pardon for having unintentionally offended me. I am not even sure that she did not attempt to weep. To all this I answered nothing, save that I attached no importance whatever to an indignity which could do me no harm; that she was free to believe and to think whatever she chose, and that I should not take the least trouble to alter her opinion. I told her I had been a soldier for ten years; my friends who know me would find some difficulty in admitting her story, and consequently I would not bother about it beyond scorning it."

"And are those really your thoughts?"

"Are you dreaming? If I could hesitate as to what I must do, it is precisely because I am a soldier that there are no two steps to be taken. Do you want me to allow a heartless woman to trifle with my honor, and repeat her miserable story to-morrow to some coquette, or to one of

those little fellows whose heads you pretend she turns? Do you suppose my name, your own, and that of our mother, can be allowed to become an object of derision? Good God! It makes me shudder!"

"Yes," said Armand; "and yet here we have the little jests full of grace that the ladies invent to pass the time away. To make out of a mere trifle a romance, very black and very scandalous, that is the good pleasure of their empty heads. But what do you intend to do now?"

"I expect to go to Paris to-night. Saint-Aubin also is a soldier; he is brave, and I am far from believing (God preserve me from it) that a word from him has given the idea of this fable, invented by some lady's maid; but most certainly I shall bring him back here, and it will not be more difficult for him to tell the truth aloud than it will be for me to listen to him. The step I have to take is vexatious and painful, without doubt; it is a sad thing to go to a comrade and tell him that I am accused of being a coward!"

"But what matter in such a case? Any course is right, and must be permitted. I repeat, it is our name I defend, and if it was not to come out of this pure as gold, I would myself tear off the cross I wear. The marquise must hear Saint-Aubin say to her, in my presence, that

they have repeated to her a foolish story, and that those who made it up lied. But once this explanation made, the marquise must listen to me also in my turn; I must give her very discreetly, in well-polished terms, when we are close together, a lesson that she shall never forget. I wish to have the small pleasure of expressing to her exactly what I think of her pride and ridiculous prudery. I do not intend to act like Bussy d'Amboise, who, after having endangered his life to collect some flowers for his mistress, threw them in her face. I will act in a more civilized manner; but when the right word produces the required effect, it matters little how it is said, and I will guarantee that, for a time at least, the marquise will be less haughty, less of a coquette, and not such a hypocrite as she is at present."

"Let us rejoin the company," said Armand, "and to-night I will go with you. I will leave you to act alone, needless to say; but, if you will permit me, I will be with you in the affair."

The marquise was preparing to go home when the two brothers reappeared. She probably guessed that she had been the subject of their conversation; but her face conveyed nothing. On the contrary, never had she seemed calmer and more pleased with herself. As we have said, she was to ride back. Tristan, doing the honors of the house, approached to take her foot and

raise her to the saddle. As she had walked on the wet sand, her boot was damp, so that the impression of it remained marked on Tristan's glove. As soon as Madame de Vernage had left, Tristan removed this glove and threw it on the ground.

"Yesterday I should have kissed it," said he to his brother.

In the evening the two young men took the stage together, and slept in Paris. Madame de Berville, always anxious and always indulgent, like the true mother she was, appeared to believe the reasons they pretended they had for leaving. The first thing on the following day, as one may well imagine, their first care was to seek out M. de Saint-Aubin, captain of dragoons, Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, in the furnished house where he always stayed when on furlough.

"Heaven grant that we find him!" said Armand. "He is perhaps in garrison far away."

"If he is in Algiers," answered Tristan, "he must speak, or at least write. I will spend six months, if necessary, but I will find him, or he shall say why."

The hotel porter was an Englishman, which was perhaps very handy for the subjects of Queen Victoria anxious to visit Paris, but awkward enough for the Parisians. At Tristan's first words he answered by the most Britannic exclamation:

"Oh!"

"What can we do now?" said Armand, still more impatient than his brother. "But is M. de Saint-Aubin here?"

"O no!"

"Does he not live in this house?"

"O yes!"

"Then he is out?"

"O no!"

"Explain yourself. Can we speak to him?"

"No, sir—impossible."

"Why impossible?"

"Because he is—how do you say it?"

"He is ill?"

"O no! He is dead."

III

It would be difficult to paint the consternation of Tristan and his brother on learning of the death of the man whom they had such a strong desire to find. Whatever may be said, death is never an indifferent thing. One does not defy it without courage, one does not see it without horror, and it is even doubtful if a large inheritance can render truly agreeable its hideous figure at the moment it presents itself. But when it suddenly takes away from us a benefit or a hope, when it meddles with our affairs and carries off what we believe we hold, it is then

especially that one feels its power, and that man remains dumb before the eternal silence.

Saint-Aubin had been killed in Algeria, in an expedition. After having been told the details of this event by the hotel people, the two brothers sadly went on their way, and returned to the house where they lived in Paris.

"What is to be done now?" said Tristan. "I thought that, to relieve the situation, I had only to say a word to an honest man, and he is gone. Poor fellow! I despise myself that a motive of personal interest mingles with the sorrow his death causes. He was a brave and worthy officer; we have bivouacked and clinked glasses together. To be thirty years old, to have lived a spotless life, and to have a good head, and a good sabre at one's side, and all to go and have yourself assassinated by a Bedouin in ambush! All is finished. I can think of nothing further. I do not wish to busy myself with stories when I have a friend to lament. Let all the marquises in the world say what they like."

"You are justly grieved," answered Armand; "I respect and share your sorrow; but, while still regretting a friend and despising a coquette, we must forget nothing. The world is here, with its laws, and sees neither your disdain nor your tears. We must answer it in its own tongue, or, at least, force it to be silent."

"And what do you want me to do? Where

shall I find a witness, some proof, a being or a thing that can speak for me? You understand very well that Saint-Aubin, when he came to me to explain, like the good fellow he was, an adventure with a grisette, did not bring with him his whole regiment. Everything was settled when we were alone. If things had been likely to become serious, then, in that case, the witnesses would surely have been there; but we shook hands and had breakfast together; we had no need to invite any one."

"But it is hardly probable," said Armand, "that this kind of quarrel and reconciliation has remained altogether a secret. Some common friends must have known it. Try to remember; search your memory."

"And of what use? Even if, on thinking deeply, I could find some one who remembers this old tale, do you want me to get a kind of testimonial from the first comer to the effect that I am no poltroon? With Saint-Aubin I could act without fear; everything can be asked a friend. But what rôle should I be playing, at this hour, if I went to one of my comrades and said, 'Do you remember a little girl at the ball, a last year's quarrel?' I should be laughed at, and with reason."

"It is true; yet it is bad to let a woman, and a proud, vindictive, and offended woman, repeat with impunity such mischievous gossip."

"Yes, it is sad, sadder than one can say. One answers an insult from a man by a sword-thrust. Against all kinds of injury, public or not—even printed—one can defend oneself. But what resource has one against a shallow calumny, repeated in the darkness, in a low voice, by a malevolent woman who wishes to annoy you? That is the triumph of cowardly indolence. That is how such a creature, in all perfidy of lying, in all security of impudence, assassinates you with a pin; that is how she lies with all the pride and all the joy of the weakness which revenges itself. That is how, quite at her ease, she whispers in the ear of a fool that she has cajoled a studied infamy, revised and augmented by the author. And this infamy proceeds apace, is repeated and commented on, and the honor and welfare of the soldier, the inheritance of ancestors, the patrimony of children, is put in question for such a trifle."

Tristan appeared to reflect for a time, then added, half-serious, half-joking:

"I feel inclined to fight La Bretonnière."

"For what?" said Armand, who could not help laughing. "What has that poor devil had to do with all this?"

"What he has done is that, it is very likely, he has informed himself regarding my affairs. He is sufficiently initiated and curious enough by nature. I should not be at all surprised

that the marquise had chosen him as a confidant."

"You must at least acknowledge that it is not his fault if he is told a story, and that he is not responsible for it."

"Bah! And if he constitutes himself the publisher of it? That man, who is but a fly, is a hundred times more jealous of Madame de Vernage than if he were her husband. And supposing she tells him this fine story invented on my behalf, do you think he is pleased to keep it secret?"

"That is better, but still one must at first be certain that he speaks of it; and, even in that case, I can hardly see that it is just to seek a quarrel with any one because he repeats what he has heard. In any case, what glory will there be in intimidating La Bretonnière? He will certainly not fight, and frankly, he would be in the right."

"He will fight. The fellow is in my way; he is annoying, and is in the way."

"In truth, my dear Tristan, you speak like a man who does not know what to attack. Would they not say, on hearing you, that you seek an affair of honor to reestablish your reputation, or that you need a scar to show it to your mistress, like some German student?"

"But the fact is that I find myself in an intolerable position. I am accused and dishon-

ored, and have no means of avenging myself. If I really thought . . ."

The two young men at this moment were on the boulevard, passing a jeweler's store. Tristan stopped again suddenly, to look at a bracelet in the window.

"How strange!" said he.

"What is it? Do you also wish to fight the girl behind the counter?"

"No; but you counseled me to ransack my memory. Here is one that presents itself, for you see that gold bracelet, which, anyhow, has no particular merit—a serpent and two turquoises; at the moment of my dispute with Saint-Aubin he had just ordered from this very merchant, in this shop, a bracelet similar to this one, which said bracelet was destined for that grisette with whom he was concerned, and who nearly caused us trouble. When our quarrel was settled, we breakfasted together, and he said to me with a laugh: 'You have just removed the queen of my thoughts at the moment I was preparing to make her a present. It was a little bracelet with my name engraved inside; but, my faith, she shall not have it! If you want to present it to her, I give it up to you; since you are the favorite, you must pay for your welcome.' 'Let us do better,' I answered; 'let us divide the gift you were about to send her.' 'You are right,' he replied; 'my name is already

on it. Yours must be engraved also, and, as a sign of good friendship, we will have the date added.'

"As we said, so we did. The dates and the two names, inscribed on the bracelet, were sent to the young lady, and should actually exist somewhere in the possession of Mademoiselle Javotte (that is the name of our heroine), unless she has sold it for a dinner."

"Marvelous!" cried Armand. "The proof you were seeking is found. This bracelet must now reappear. The marquise must see the two signatures, and the exact date. Mademoiselle Javotte herself must testify in the cause of truth to the identity of the thing. Will that not suffice to clearly prove that nothing serious can have taken place between Saint-Aubin and yourself? Certainly, two friends who to amuse themselves make such a present to a woman they are disputing about, can not be very much in anger with each other, and it thus becomes evident . . ."

"Yes, that is all very well," said Tristan; "your mind works faster than mine, but to execute this great undertaking, do you not see that before finding this precious bracelet, we must begin by finding Javotte? Unhappily, these two discoveries seem equally difficult. If, on the one hand, the young person is subject to losing her clothes, she is capable, on the other

hand, of losing herself. To look, after an interval of a year, for a grisette lost in the streets of Paris, and in this grisette's box, for a gage of love made of metal, appears to me beyond the power of man; it is a dream impossible to realize."

"Why?" answered Armand. "At any rate, let us make the attempt. See how chance, of its own accord, furnishes you with the indication you are in need of. You had forgotten this bracelet; fate places it almost before your eyes, or at least it recalls it to you. You were seeking a witness; here it is, it is unexceptionable. This bracelet tells all your friendship for Saint-Aubin, his esteem for you, the lack of anything serious in the affair. Fortune is a woman, my dear fellow; when she makes the advances, one must profit by it. Think of it, you have only this means of imposing silence on Madame de Vernage. Mademoiselle Javotte and her blue serpentine are your only and unique resource. Paris is large, it is true, but we have time in our favor. Let us not lose it; and, to begin with, where did this young lady formerly live?"

"To tell you the truth, I have no idea; it was, I think, in a passage, a kind of square, in the old town."

"Let us see the jeweler and question him. Merchants have sometimes an incredible mem-

ory. They remember people years after, especially those who pay none too well."

Tristan allowed himself to be guided by his brother. They both entered the shop. It was not an easy thing to recall to the merchant's mind an article of small value, bought from him a long time ago. However, he had not forgotten it, on account of the peculiarity of the two names engraved side by side.

"Yes, I remember a small bracelet that two young men ordered of me last winter, and I recognized monsieur at once. But as to knowing where this bracelet was sent, and to whom, I can say nothing."

"It was to a Mademoiselle Javotte," said Armand, "and she seems to have lived in a passage."

"Wait," continued the jeweler. He opened his book, ran over the pages, reflected, consulted his memory, and finished by saying: "Here is the very thing; but it is not the name of Javotte I find on my books. It is 'Madame de Monval, 4 cité Bergère.'"

"You are right," said Tristan; "so she called herself. That name of Monval had slipped my memory. Perhaps she had the right to bear it, for her title of Javotte was, I think, but a nickname. Do you still work for her? Has she bought anything further from you?"

"No, monsieur; on the contrary, she has sold me a broken silver chain which she possessed."

"But no bracelet?"

"No, monsieur."

"Good for Monval!" said Armand. "Many thanks, monsieur. And as for us, let's be off to the cité Bergère."

"I believe," said Tristan as they left the jeweler, "that we had better drive. I rather fear Madame de Monval may have changed her address more than once, and that our journey may prove to be a long one."

This prevision turned out to be right. The janitress of the cité Bergère informed the two brothers that Madame de Monval had left some time before; that at present she called herself Mademoiselle Durand, was a milliner, and lived in the Rue Saint-Jacques.

"Is she comfortable? Has she sufficient to live on?" asked Armand, driven by fear of the sale of the bracelet.

"O yes, monsieur; she lives well. She had a complete apartment there, mahogany furniture and a full complement of kitchen utensils. Many military men called on her, all decorated and very smart. At times she gave some very swell dinners that were ordered from the Café Vachette. All these gentlemen were very gay, and there was one who had a fine voice; he sang like a true artist from the academy. Besides,

monsieur, there was never any complaint regarding Madame de Monval. She also was studying to become an artist. I was her housekeeper, and she never went out but in a coach."

"Very good," said Armand. "Let us go to the Rue Saint-Jacques."

"Mademoiselle Durand no longer lives here," answered the second janitress. "She has been gone six months, and we do not know where she is. It can not be in a palace, for she did not leave in a coach, and did not carry very much away with her."

"Did she live unhappily?"

"Oh, my God! a very poor life she led. She was hardly comfortable, this young lady. She lived at the end of the alley, over the court, behind the fruiterers. She worked all day; she made very little, and was very unfortunate. She went to market in the morning, and made her own soup on a small stove she had. One can not say she was untidy, but there was always an odor of cabbage in her room. A lady in mourning, an aunt of hers, came and fetched her away. We thought she had joined the Sisters of the Bon-Pasteur. The laundress at the corner can perhaps tell you; it was she who employed her."

"Let us go to the laundress," said Armand; "but the cabbages are a bad omen."

The third account they gathered with regard to Javotte was at first no more satisfactory than

the other two. In consideration of a small sum that her family had found means to furnish, she had in fact entered the convent of the Sisters of the Bon-Pasteur, and had stayed there for about three months. As her conduct was good, the protection of some charitable individuals had had her admitted by the Sisters, who showed her much kindness and had only praise for her obedience. "Unhappily," said the laundress, "the poor child has such spirits that it is impossible for her to stay long anywhere. It was a great favor for her to be received as a boarder by the nuns. Every one spoke well of her, and she regularly fulfilled her religious duties; at the same time she worked well, for she was a good worker. But suddenly she lost her head; she asked to be allowed to leave. You must understand, monsieur, that nowadays a convent is not a prison; the doors were opened to her, and she disappeared."

"And you are ignorant of what became of her?"

"Not altogether," laughingly replied the laundress. "One of my young ladies met her at the Ranelagh. She now calls herself Mademoiselle Amelina Rosenval. I think she lives in the Rue de Bréda, and that she appears at the Folies Dramatiques."

Tristan began to be discouraged. "Let us drop it all," said he to his brother. "From the

turn things are taking, we shall never finish. Who knows if Mademoiselle Durand, Madame de Monval, Madame Rosenval, is not in China or at Quimper-Corentin?"

"We must go and see," said Armand, as before. "We have gone too far to stop. Who can say that we are not on the point of discovering our traveler? Workman or artist, nun or dancer, I will find her. Let us not do, like the man who had made a bet to walk barefooted over a frozen lake in the month of January, and who, after getting half-way, found it was too cold and retraced his steps."

Armand was right this time. Madame Rosenval in person was discovered, in Rue de Bréda, but at this new address it was no longer a question of the convent, nor of cabbages, nor of the Ranelagh. From the dancer she originally was, Madame Rosenval had suddenly become, thanks to chance and an old prefect, an important personage and protector of the arts, the prima donna of a provincial theater. For some time she had been living in one of the larger towns of the center of France, where her talent, newly discovered but generously encouraged, delighted the connoisseurs of the district and became the admiration of the garrison. She happened to be in Paris for a time, in an attempt to obtain an engagement in the capital, if possible. The two young men were told, it is true, that it was

uncertain if they could see her; but they were introduced by a maid into a richly decorated apartment, hardly severe in taste, adorned with statues, mirrors, and paintings, something like a café. The mistress of the place was finishing her toilette; she sent word for them to wait, and that she would receive M. de Berville.

"I will leave you now," said Armand to his brother; "you see we have finished our campaign. It is for you to do the rest. Let her accompany it with a word from her which will give more weight to this restitution. Return armed with this authentic proof, and let us laugh the marquise to scorn."

With these words Armand went out, and Tristan remained alone, walking up and down Javotte's sumptuous apartment. He had been there a quarter of an hour, when the bedroom door was opened. A large, stout gentleman, grand and gray-headed, wearing glasses, a chain, a binocle, and watch-charms all of gold, advanced with an affable, majestic air.

"Monsieur," said he to Tristan, "I hear you are a relative of Madame Rosenval. If you will take the trouble to enter, she awaits you in her boudoir."

He bowed slightly and retired.

"I see," said Tristan to himself. "It seems that Javotte keeps better company now than in the alley of the Rue Saint-Jacques."

Lifting a portière trimmed with silk lace that had been pointed out to him by the gentleman with the gold eye-glasses, he penetrated into a boudoir hung with rose-colored muslin, where Madame Rosenval, stretched on a sofa, listlessly received him. As a man never rediscovers, without pleasure, a woman he has loved, be she even a Javotte, especially when he has taken so much trouble to find her, Tristan hastened to kiss the beautiful white hand of his former conquest, then sat down beside her, and commenced, as he should, by complimenting her on her increased beauty, and telling her he found her more charming than ever, etc. (all the things we tell any woman we find again, even were she become more ugly than mortal sin).

"Allow me, my dear," he added, "to congratulate you on the happy change that seems to have taken place in your affairs. You are installed here like a grand dame."

"You are still the wicked joker, Monsieur de Berville," answered Javotte. "All this is very simple. It is but a temporary lodging; but I am having something fixed up for me over there, for, you know, I am acting."

"Yes, I heard you were at the theater."

"My God, yes; I made up my mind to it. You know that great music, serious music, has been the occupation of my entire life. M. Le Baron, whom you have just seen, I suppose,

leaving here, and who is one of my good friends, importuned me to take an engagement. What could I do? I allowed myself to be persuaded. We play all kinds of things—drama, vaudeville, opera."

"I have heard all that," resumed Tristan, "but I want to speak to you of a somewhat serious matter, and as your time must be precious, allow me to hasten to profit by the occasion to tell you what I want. Do you remember a certain bracelet?"

While speaking, Tristan absent-mindedly glanced at the mantelpiece. The first thing he noticed was the visiting-card of Le Bretonnière stuck in the edge of the mirror.

"Do you know that person?" he asked with surprise.

"Yes. He is a friend of the Baron. I see him from time to time, and I verily believe he is to dine with us to-day. But continue, I beg you, and I will listen."

IV

THERE would perhaps be, for the philosopher or the psychologist, as they say now, a curious study to be made in the chapter of distractions. Let us imagine a man who is in the midst of speaking of things that most concern him to the person from whom he has most to fear or to hope

for, to a lawyer, a woman, or a minister. What degree of influence would be exercised over him by a pin pricking him in the middle of his discourse, by a torn buttonhole, by a neighbor playing the flute? What would an actor do, reciting a passage in some play, and suddenly perceiving one of his creditors in the theater? Finally, to what point can one speak of one thing, and at the same time be thinking of another?

Tristan found himself in a somewhat similar position. For one thing, as he had said, time was passing; the gentleman with the eye-glasses might reappear at any moment. Besides, in the ear of a woman who is listening to you there is a fly one must capture on the wing; the moment when it is not too soon with her, it is generally too late. Tristan attached sufficient importance to what he had come to ask Javotte about to employ all his eloquence.

The more strange and extraordinary might appear the step that he was taking, the more he felt the necessity of prompt action. But, on the other hand, he had before his eyes the card of La Bretonnière, his eyes could not be torn away from it. And, still pursuing the object of his visit, he repeated to himself: "Am I to run across this man everywhere?"

"Well, what do you want?" said Javotte. "You are as absent-minded as a poet about to bring forth."

Needless to say, Tristan had no wish to speak of his secret motive, or to pronounce the marquise's name.

"I can explain nothing," he answered. "I can only tell you one thing, and that is that you would infinitely oblige me by returning the bracelet that Saint-Aubin and myself gave you, if it still in your possession."

"But what do you wish to do with it?"

"Nothing that can alarm you. I pledge my word."

"I believe you, Berville; you are a man of honor. May the devil take me, but I believe you."

Madame Rosenval, in her new grandeur, had preserved a few expressions which still reeked somewhat of cabbages.

"I am charmed," said Tristan, "that you have such a good remembrance of me; you do not forget your friends."

"Forget my friends! Never! You have seen me in this world when I was without a sou. I am pleased to remember it. I had two pairs of stockings which succeeded each other, and I took my soup in a wooden spoon. Now I dine off massive silver, with a lackey behind and turkeys in front of me; but my heart is always the same. Do you know that in our youth we knew how to amuse ourselves? At present I am weary as a king. Do you remember one day—at Mont-

morency— No, it was not you; I am mistaken; but no matter, it was charming. Ah, the good cherries! And those veal cutlets that we ate at father Duval's, in the Château de la Chasse, while the old cock, that poor Coco, was picking the crumbs off the table! But there were two Englishmen foolish enough to give it brandy to drink, and it died from the effects. Did you know that?"

When Javotte spoke this, in a natural way, it was with an extreme volubility. But when she came back to her grand airs, she suddenly set to work to spin out her phrases with an air of reverie and distraction.

"Yes, really," she continued, in the tone of a duchess with a cold, "I always remember with pleasure all that is attached to the past."

"That is wonderful, my dear Javotte. But answer, I pray you, my question. Have you kept that bracelet?"

"What bracelet, Berville? What do you mean?"

"That bracelet I am asking you for, that Saint-Aubin and I gave you."

"For shame! You wish to take away a gift! That is not very gentlemanly, my dear."

"There is no question of gentility in this. As I told you, it is a question of a very important service you can render me. Reflect, I conjure you, and answer me seriously. If it is only the

bracelet that you care about, I willingly engage to place another on each arm in exchange for the one I need."

"It is very gallant on your part."

"No, it is not gallant; it is very simple. I am now speaking but in my own interest."

"But first of all," said Javotte, rising and playing with her fan, "I must know, as I told you, what you are about to do with this bracelet. I can not confide in a man who himself has no confidence in me. Come, now, tell me of your affairs. There is some woman, some trickery in all this. I will bet it is some old mistress of yours or Saint-Aubin's who wishes to despoil me of my household utensils. There is some disagreement, some jealousy, some sinister design. Come, speak!"

"If I must absolutely tell you my motive," answered Tristan, wishing to get rid of these questions, "the truth is that Saint-Aubin is dead. We were very intimate, as you know, and I wanted to keep this bracelet on which our two names were engraved side by side."

"Bah! What tale are you telling me now? Saint-Aubin is dead? Since when?"

"He died in Africa, a little while ago."

"Is that true? Poor fellow! I loved him well. His was a gentle heart, and I remember that in times gone by he called me his rosy beauty. 'Here is my rosy beauty,' he would

say. I think that name is very pretty. Do you remember how funny he was one day that we were at Ermenonville, and broke everything in the inn? There was not even a plate left. We threw the chairs out of the window, and in the morning, of course, there arrived upon the scene a large family of good people from the provinces, come to see nature. There was not a single cup left in which to give them their coffee."

"Foolish woman!" said Tristan; "can you not, just for once, pay attention to what is said to you? Have you my bracelet?—yes, or no."

"I know nothing about it, and I do not care for propositions made at such close range."

"But you have, I suppose, a box, a drawer, or some place where you put your jewels? Open me this drawer or this box; I ask nothing more."

Javotte seemed to reflect a little, sat down again near Tristan, and took his hand.

"Listen," said she. "You understand that if this bracelet is necessary to you, I set no store by such a trifle. I feel friendly toward you, Berville; there is nothing I would not do to oblige you. But you must also understand that my position imposes duties upon me. It is possible that, some day or other, I may join the chorus at the opera. M. le Baron has promised to use all his influence. An old prefect like him has standing with the ministers, and M. de la Bretonnière, on his part . . ."

"La Bretonnière?" cried Tristan impatiently. "And what the devil is he doing here? Apparently he finds means of being both in Paris and the country at the same time. He never leaves us down there, and yet I find him here!"

"I tell you he is a friend of the Baron's. M. de la Bretonnière is a very distinguished man. It is true he has a country house near you, and that he often visits some one you are probably acquainted with, a marquise, or countess—I no longer remember her name."

"Does he speak of her to you? What does this mean?"

"Certainly, he speaks of her to us. He sees her every day, doesn't he? He has his place at her table; her name is Vernage, or something like that. We know how it is, among ourselves, between neighbors and neighbors— Well, what is the matter with you?"

"A plague upon the coxcomb!" said Tristan, taking La Bretonnière's card and crumpling it between his fingers. "One of these days I must tell him what I think of him."

"Oh! oh! Berville, you are getting angry, my dear. La Vernage touches you, I see. Well, come, let us make an exchange. Your confidence for my bracelet."

"You have it, then, this bracelet?"

"You love her, then, this marquise?"

"Do not joke. Have you got it?"

"No, I don't say that. I repeat that my position . . ."

"Fine position! Are you making fun of people? Were you to enter the opera, and get to be a dancer at twenty sous a day . . ."

"A dancer!" cried Javotte in anger. "For whom do you take me, if you please! I shall sing in the chorus, you must know!"

"No more than I. They will let you put on the tights and a cap, and you will walk in procession behind the Princess Isabelle; or else they will give you on Sunday a little cash for lifting you at the end of a pulley in the ballet of La Sylphide. What do you mean by your position?"

"I mean, and I maintain, that for nothing in the world would I wish M. le Baron to see my name mixed up in any scrape. As you see, in order to be able to receive you, I said that you were my relation. I do not know what you will do with this bracelet, and you are not inclined to tell me. M. le Baron has never known me except as Madame de Rosenval; it is the name of an estate that my father has sold. I have masters, my dear; I am studying, and I wish to do nothing that may compromise my future."

The more the conversation was prolonged the more Tristan suffered from the resistance and strange levity of Javotte. Evidently the bracelet was there, in that very room perhaps; but

where was he to find it? At times Tristan felt inclined to do as the robbers do, and to employ threats to attain his end. A little gentleness and patience, however, seemed preferable.

"My brave Javotte," said he, "do not let us get angry. I firmly believe all you tell me. Neither do I wish in any way to compromise you. Sing at the opera as much as you like, even dance, if you think fit. My intention is in no way . . ."

"Dance! I who have played Célimène! Yes, my little one, I played Célimène at Belleville, before leaving for the country; and my manager, M. Poupinel, who attended the representation, immediately engaged me for *Les troisième Dugazons*. I was afterward second grande première coquette, the first prominent rôle, and première chanteuse; and it is Brochard himself, a light tenor, who made me cancel my engagement, and Gustave, that is Laruette, who traveled with me in Auvergne. We were making four or five hundred francs with *La Tour de Nesle* and *Adolphe et Clara*. Everywhere we only played those two pieces. And you think I am going to be a dancer!"

"Do not get angry, ma belle, I beg of you."

"Do you know, I have played with Frédéric? Yes, I have played with Frédéric, in the country, for the benefit of a man of letters. It is

true I had no great part; I was a page in *Lucrèce Borgia*, but still I have played with Frédéric."

"I do not doubt it; you will certainly not dance. I beg you to excuse me. But, my dear, time is passing, and you answer many things except what I ask you. Let us finish with it, if that is possible. Tell me, will you permit me to go this very instant to Fossin, to buy a bracelet, a chain, a ring, whatever you like, whatever may please you, and send or bring it to you, according to your desire?—in exchange for which you will send me or give me that trifle I ask of you, and on which you doubtless place small value?"

"Who knows?" said Javotte in a pacified voice; "we like trifles; and I am the same—I like my belongings."

"But this bracelet is not worth ten louis, and apparently it is not what is written on it that renders it precious in your eyes."

Masculine vanity on one side, and feminine coquetry on the other, are two things so natural, things, too, which always find their level so well, that Tristan had been unable to prevent himself from drawing nearer to Javotte in addressing this question to her. He had gently placed his arm around the slender waist of his old friend; and Javotte, her head inclined on her fan, smiled, sighing gently, while the young officer's mus-

tache was already brushing against her blond hair. The remembrance of the past and the idea of a new bracelet made her heart beat.

"Speak, Tristan," said she; "be quite frank with me. I am good-hearted; have no fear. Tell me where my blue serpentine will go."

"Well, my child," answered the young man, "I will tell you all—I am in love."

"Is she beautiful?"

"You are more beautiful than she. She is jealous, and wants this bracelet. It has come to her ears, I do not know how, that I loved you . . ."

"Liar!"

"No, it is the truth. You were, my dear, you are still, so perfectly charming, fresh, and coquettish, a little flower; your teeth look like pearls that have fallen into a rose; your eyes, your foot . . ."

"Well," said Javotte, still sighing.

"Well," resumed Tristan, "and our bracelet?"

Javotte was preparing, perhaps, to reply in her most tender voice, "Well, my good friend, go to Fossin's," when she suddenly cried, "Take care! you are scratching me."

La Bretonnière's visiting-card was still in Tristan's hand, and the corner of the bent card had touched Madame Rosenval's shoulder. At the same instant, some one gently knocked at the

door; the tapestry was raised, and La Bretonnière himself entered the room.

"The devil, monsieur," cried Tristan, unable to control a feeling of vexation; "you arrive like March in Lent."

"Like Mars in all seasons," said La Bretonnière, enchanted with his pun.

"One could see that," resumed Tristan.

"When you wish," said La Bretonnière.

"To-morrow you shall hear from me."

Tristan rose and took Javotte aside: "I can count on you, can I not?" said he in a whisper; "in an hour I will send."

Then he went out without further ceremony, repeating once more, "To-morrow."

"What does this mean?" demanded Javotte.

"My faith, I know nothing about it," said La Bretonnière.

V

Armand, as one may well think, had impatiently awaited his brother's return in order to learn the result of his conversation with Javotte. Tristan came home quite happy.

"Victory, my boy!" cried he; "we have won the battle, and, better still, for to-morrow we will have all the pleasures in the world at once."

"Bah!" said Armand; "what is the matter? You wear an appearance of gaiety which it is a pleasure to see."

"It is not without cause or without trouble. Javotte hesitated; she chattered about nothing; she talked enough to make me sleep standing up; but finally she will give in, I am certain; I am counting on her. To-night we shall have my bracelet, and to-morrow, to amuse ourselves, we will fight La Bretonnière."

"Still this poor man! Do you bear him such ill-will?"

"In truth, no. I no longer bear ill-feeling toward him. I met him; I sent him about his business; I will give him a sword-thrust and then pardon him."

"Where, then, did you see him? At your beauty's?"

"My God! yes. He must needs push in everywhere."

"And how did the quarrel begin?"

"There is no quarrel. Two words, I tell you —a mere nothing; we will talk about it. Let us begin now by going to Fossin to buy something for Javotte, with whom I arranged an exchange; for one gives nothing for nothing when one's name is Javotte, and even without that."

"Come," said Armand; "like you, I am delighted that you have arrived at your goal and that you have the wherewith to confound the marquise. But on the way, my dear friend, let us reflect, I beg you, regarding the second part

of your projected vengeance. It seems to me more than strange."

"A truce to words," said Tristan; "it is a settled fact. Whether I am right or wrong does not matter; we can discuss the matter this morning; at present the wine is drawn, we must drink it."

"I shall never tire of telling you," resumed Armand, "that I can not conceive how a man like yourself, a soldier, known to be brave, can find pleasure in these duels without motive, this child's play, these schoolboy bravados, which have perhaps been the custom, but which every one laughs at in these days. Party quarrels, cockade duels, can be understood in political crises. It may seem pleasant to a Republican to cross swords with a Royalist, simply because they happen to meet. Passions are in play, and everything can be excused. But I do not advise you in this case; I blame you. If your project is serious, I do not hesitate to tell you that in such case I should refuse to act as a second to my best friend."

"I do not ask you to do so, but to be silent. Let us go to Fossin's."

"Let us go where you like, I shall not give up. To take a dislike to an intruder, that happens to every one; to flee from him or laugh at him also is allowed; but to wish to kill him, that is horrible."

"I tell you I shall not kill him; I promise you and give you my word. A slight sword-thrust, that is all. I wish to place the arm of the cavalier servant of the marquise in a sling, at the same time that I shall humbly offer her the bracelet of my grisette."

"Think how useless that is. If you fight to clear your honor, what have you to do with the bracelet? If the bracelet is sufficient, what have you to do with the quarrel? Have you any love for me? This shall not be."

"I love you very much, but this shall be."

Speaking thus, the two brothers arrived at Fossin's. Tristan, unwilling that Javotte should be able to repent her bargain, chose for her a pretty chatelaine that he had wrapped up with care, intending to carry it himself and await the answer if he was not received. Armand, thinking of other things, and seeing his brother still happier at the thought of promptly returning with the bracelet in question, did not propose to accompany him. It was arranged that they should meet in the evening.

At the moment that they were about to separate, the wheel of an open carriage, noisily rumbling along, ground the pavement of the Rue Richelieu. A curious livery, which attracted the eye, caused the passers-by to turn round. In this carriage was Madame de Vernage, alone, reclining nonchalantly. She perceived the two

young men, and saluted them with a nod protectively indolent.

"Ah," said Tristan, paling in spite of himself, "it seems the enemy has come to examine the fort. She has given up her famous hunting, this fine lady, to take a turn in the Champs-Élysées and breathe the dust of Paris. Let her go in peace. She arrives just at the right time. I am truly flattered at seeing her here. Were I a coxcomb, I should think she had come to see how I was getting on. But not at all. Look with what aristocratic ease, superior even to that of Javotte, she deigned to notice us. We can bet she does not know what she has come for; these women seek danger, as moths do the light. May her sleep to-night be light! I shall present myself to-morrow the first thing, and we shall hear the news. I feel it a veritable fête to conquer such pride with such arms. If she knew that I have here, in my hands, a small present for a little girl, in consideration of which I have the right to say to her, 'Your beautiful lips have lied, and your kisses have the odor of calumny,' what would she say? She would perhaps be less superb, not less beautiful. Good-by, my dear fellow, till to-night."

If Armand had not attempted at greater length to dissuade his brother from fighting, it was not that he thought it impossible to prevent it; but he knew him to be too violent, especially

at such a moment, to attempt to convince him by argument; he liked better to take other steps. La Bretonnière, whom he knew of old, appeared to him to have a calmer character, more easy of access; he had seen him hunting with caution. He went to see him at once, resolved to find out if, from this side, there was not a better chance for reconciliation.

La Bretonnière was alone in his room, surrounded by bundles of papers, like a man setting his affairs in order. Armand expressed all the regret he felt at seeing that a word (of which he was ignorant, said he) could lead two men of heart to fight, and thence to go to prison.

"What have you done to my brother?" he asked him.

"My faith, I know nothing about it," said La Bretonnière, rising and seating himself in turn somewhat embarrassed, while still preserving his ordinary gravity. Your brother has for a long time seemed to dislike me; but, if I must speak frankly, I must say that I am absolutely ignorant of the reason."

"Is there not some rivalry between you? Are you not courting some woman?"

"No; in truth, as far as I am concerned, I am courting no one, and I see no reasonable motive that has caused your brother to overleap the bounds of politeness in this manner."

"Have you never had a dispute?"

" Never, with one exception, at the time of the cholera. M. de Berville, while chatting at dessert, insisted that a contagious disease is always epidemic, and he pretended to base on this false principle the difference that has been established between the words epidemic and endemic. I could not, you must understand, agree with him, and I thoroughly demonstrated to him that an epidemic disease could become very dangerous without communicating itself by contact. The discussion became somewhat heated, I agree."

" Is that all? "

" All I can remember. Perhaps, however, he was hurt, some time ago, by my ceding to one of my relatives two terriers that he wanted. But what could I do? This relative chanced to come and see me. I show him my dogs; he finds these terriers . . . "

" That can not be it; there is nothing in that to make one tear one's eyes out."

" Nothing I can see, I confess; and I tell you conscientiously, that I do not exactly understand anything about the challenge he has just sent me."

" But if you are courting no one, he is perhaps in love with that marquise with whom we go hunting? "

" It is possible, but I do not think so. I have no remembrance of ever having noticed that the

Marquise de Vernage would suffer or encourage any attentions you could condemn."

"Who is talking of anything condemnable? Is there any harm in being in love?"

"I do not dispute that question. I confine myself to telling you that I am not, and that consequently, I can not be any one's rival."

"In that case, you will not fight?"

"I beg your pardon. I have been challenged in the most positive manner. He said to me, when I entered, that I arrived like March in Lent. Such words can not be tolerated. I must have satisfaction."

"You will cut your throats for one word?"

"These crises are very serious. I do not enter into the reasons that led to this challenge. I am astonished, because it seems strange to me, but I can not do otherwise than accept."

"Is such a duel possible? Yet you are not mad, neither is Berville. Come, La Bretonnière, let us discuss it. Do you think it amuses me to see you act so foolishly?"

"I am not a weak man, but neither am I a bloodthirsty man. If your brother makes excuses, so long as they are good and valid I am ready to receive them. Otherwise, here is my will, which I am in the midst of writing, as should be."

"What do you mean by valid excuses?"

"I mean . . . You understand."

"Once more, sir."

"Good excuses."

"Come, now, tell me exactly."

"Well, he told me I arrived like March in Lent, and I think I answered worthily. He must withdraw that word, and let him tell me, before witnesses, that I arrived simply as M. de La Bretonnière."

"I think that if he is reasonable he can not refuse you that."

Armand came away from this conference not entirely satisfied, but less anxious than when he went. It was in the Boulevard de Gand, between eleven and midnight, that he was to meet his brother. He found him walking rapidly and apparently much agitated, and began to tell him of the means of settlement in the terms desired by La Bretonnière, when Tristan took him by the arm, crying:

"All is lost! Javotte is playing with me. I have not got my bracelet."

"Why?"

"Why? How do I know? A swallow's whim. I went direct to her. I am told she is out. I assure myself that she is not in, and ask if she did not leave anything for me. The chambermaid looks at me in astonishment. By means of questions, I learned that Madame Rosenval dined with her baron with the eye-glasses and another person, without doubt this damned La

Bretonnière; that they afterward separated, La Bretonnière going home, Javotte and the baron going to the theater, not in the house but on the stage; and I do not know what other incomprehensible things; all mingled with servant's verbiage. 'Madame had received good news; madame appeared very pleased; she was in a hurry, they had not had time to take dessert, but had sent to the cellar for some champagne.' Nevertheless I take from my pocket the little box from Fossin, which I give to the chambermaid, begging her to give it to-night to her mistress, and in confidence. Without attempting to understand what I can know, I add to my present a hastily written note. Thereupon I return, I count the minutes and no answer arrives. That is how things stand. Now that this girl has I know not what in her head, will she turn aside to oblige me? What wind has blown on this weathercock?"

"But," said Armand, "the play was over late; this weathercock must need time to read and to answer, to find the bracelet and to send it off. We shall find it at your rooms later on. Remember that Javotte can hardly accept your present but as an exchange. As for your duel, think no more about it."

"Oh, my God! I am not thinking of it; I am going . . ."

"Fool that you are! And our mother?"

Tristan lowered his head without answering, and the two brothers went in.

Javotte, however, was not as bad as one may think. She had spent the day in singular perplexity. This bracelet that was asked back, this insistence, this projected duel, all this seemed to her so many incomprehensible dreams. She was thinking what she ought to do, and felt that the wisest was to remain indifferent to events that did not concern her. But if Madame Rosenval had all the pride of a queen of the theater, Javotte, at heart, was kindly disposed. Berville was young and pleasant; the name of this marquise mingled with all this; this mystery, these semi-confidences, pleased the imagination of the upstart grisette.

"If it were true that he still loved me a little," she thought, "and that a marquise were jealous of me, would there be so much risk in giving up this bracelet? Neither the baron nor the others would know of it. I never wear it; why not render a service, if it does no harm to any one?"

Still reflecting, she had opened a small secretary, the key of which hung at her neck. Here were piled up all the jewels of her crown, a tinsel diadem for *La Tour de Nesle*, chains of paste, glass emeralds which needed lamps to make them shine with a doubtful luster. From the midst of this treasure she drew Tristan's

bracelet, and attentively considered the two names engraved inside.

"It is pretty, this serpentine," said she. "What can be Berville's idea in wishing to have it back? He thinks he is sacrificing me. If the unknown knows me, I am compromised. These two names, side by side, that is not authorized. If Berville only had a whim for me, is it a reason? Bah! He will give me another. It will be funny."

Javotte was perhaps on the point of sending the bracelet, when a ring came and interrupted her reflections. It was the gentleman with gold eye-glasses.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "I announce a success; you are in the chorus. It is not, at first sight, an extremely brilliant affair—thirty sous, you know; but what matter? That pretty foot is in the stirrup. From to-night you will wear a domino in the masked ball in *Gustave.*"

"What news!" cried Javotte, leaping with joy. "Chorister at the opera! Chorister at once! I have just rehearsed my song; my voice is good. To-night, *Gustave!* Oh, my God!"

After the first moment of intoxication, Madame Rosenval returned to the gravity becoming a singer.

"Baron," said she, "you are a charming man. There is only you, and I feel my vocation. Let us dine; let us go to the opera together; let us

return, have supper, and then away you go. I am already sleeping on my laurels."

The expected guest soon arrived. The dinner was hurried, and Javotte did not fail to wish to start much earlier than was necessary. Her heart beat as she entered by the actor's door, in that old, dark, and small corridor where Taglioni perhaps had trod. As the ballet was applauded, Madame Rosenval, covered with a rose-colored cowl, believed she had contributed to the success. She went home very much moved, and in the intoxication of triumph her thoughts were a hundred leagues from Tristan, when her maid handed to her the little box, carefully packed by Fossin, and a note in which she found these words: "Pleasure must not make you forget an old friend who needs a service rendered to him. Be good, as of old. I am impatiently awaiting your reply."

"The poor boy!" said Madame Rosenval, "I had forgotten him. He sends me a chatelaine; there are several turquoises . . ."

Javotte went to bed, and hardly slept at all. She was dreaming far more of her engagements and her brilliant future than of Tristan's demand. But daylight found him again in her thoughts.

"Come," said she, "I must act. Yesterday was a happy day; every one must be content."

It was eight in the morning when Javotte took

her bracelet, put on her shawl and her hat, and went out, her heart full, and almost a grisette again. Arriving at Tristan's house, she saw, before the porter's lodge, a large woman, her eyes bathed in tears.

"Monsieur de Berville?" asked Javotte.

"Alas!" answered the big woman.

"Is he here, please? Is this where he lives?"

"Alas! madame . . . he has fought . . . they have just brought him home . . . he is dead!"

Next day Javotte sang for the second time in the chorus at the opera, under a fourth name that she had chosen, that of Madame Amaldi.

THE BEAUTY SPOT

I

In 1756, when Louis XV, weary of the quarrels between the magistracy and the Grand Council concerning the tax of two sous,* decided to hold a court of justice, the members of Parliament resigned their offices. Sixteen of these resignations were accepted, and the exile of the same number immediately followed. "But could you," said Madame de Pompadour to one of the presidents, "Mr. Mayor, could you, a handful of men, resist the authority of the king? Would you not have an ill opinion of them? Take off your official robes, M. le President, and you will see all this as I see it."

It was not only the exiles who bore the penalty of their ill-will, but also their relatives and friends. The opening of letters amused the King. As a relief from the ennui caused by his pleasures, he had read to him by his favorites anything interesting which was found in the post. To be sure, under the pretext of acting as his own secret police, he diverted himself with the thousand intrigues which thus passed under

* Two sous per livre on a tenth of the income.

The Chevalier watched the Marquise write.

THE BEAUTY SPOT

I

In 1756, when Louis XV, weary of the quarrels between the magistracy and the Grand Council concerning the tax of two sous,* decided to hold a court of justice, the members of Parliament resigned their offices. Sixteen of these resignations were accepted, and the exile of the same number immediately followed. "But could you," said Madame de Pompadour to one of the presidents, "could you coolly see a handful of men resist the authority of the king? Would you not have an ill opinion of them? Take off your official robes, M. le President, and you will see all this as I see it."

It was not only the exiles who bore the penalty of their ill-will, but also their relatives and friends. The opening of letters amused the King. As a relief from the ennui caused by his pleasures, he had read to him by his favorites anything interesting which was found in the post. To be sure, under the pretext of acting as his own secret police, he diverted himself with the thousand intrigues which thus passed under

* Two sous per livre on a tenth of the income.

his eyes; but whoever, near or far, was connected with leaders of faction, was almost always lost. It is known that Louis XV, with all kinds of weaknesses, had but one strong quality, that of being inexorable.

One evening, as he sat before the fire, with his feet resting on the andirons, melancholy as usual, the marquise, glancing over a packet of letters, shrugged her shoulders and laughed. The King asked what was the matter.

"I find here," she replied, "a letter which has no common sense, but it is a touching thing and pitiful."

"What is it signed?" said the King.

"There is no name; it is a love-letter."

"And to whom is it addressed?"

"That is the joke. It is addressed to Mademoiselle d'Annebault, the niece of my good friend, Madame d'Estrades. They apparently put it in with these papers so that I should see it."

"And what is in it?" still questioned the King.

"But I tell you it is about love. There is mention, also, of Vauvert and of Neauflette. Are there any gentlemen in those places? Does your Majesty know them?"

The King prided himself on knowing France by heart—that is to say, the nobility of France. The etiquette of his court, which he had studied, was not more familiar to him than the coats of

arms of his kingdom—not an extensive amount of learning, but all that was valued. His vanity was concerned in this, and the hierarchy was before his eyes as the marble staircase of his palace; he wished to be complete master of it.

After having pondered for some minutes, he frowned, as if struck by an unpleasant memory; then, signing to the marquise to read on, he leaned back in his easy chair, saying, with a smile, "Proceed; the girl is pretty."

Madame de Pompadour, assuming her sweetest scoffing tone, started to read a long letter filled with amorous passages.

"'Observe,' said the writer, 'how the fates persecute me! Everything seemed disposed to fulfil my earnest desires, and you yourself, my dearest, did you not give me hopes of happiness? Yet I must renounce them, and all for a fault which I did not commit. Is it not an excess of cruelty to have raised me to the heavens, only to cast me into the abyss? When an unfortunate is doomed to death, do they take a barbarous pleasure in leaving before his eyes everything which will make him love and regret life? Yet such is my lot. I have no other refuge, no hope but the grave, and because I am unfortunate I must no longer aspire to your hand. When fortune smiled upon me, my whole hope was that you should be mine. Now that I am poor, it would horrify me if I dared think of it longer;

and since I can not make you happy, even though I die of love, I forbid you to love me.' "

The marquise smiled at the last words.

" Madame," said the King, " this is an honest man. But what is it that prevents his marrying his mistress? "

" Permit me, sire, to continue: ' This injustice which crushes me, surprises me, coming from the best of kings. You know that my father requested a place for me as cornet or ensign in the guards, and that my existence depended upon this place, since it would give me the right to offer myself to you. The Duke de Biron proposed my name, but the King has rejected me in a manner the memory of which is very bitter to me; for if my father has his own way of thinking (I admit this may be a fault), ought I to be punished for it? My devotion to the King is as true as my love for you. Both the one and the other would be clearly seen if I could draw a sword. It is discouraging that they refuse my request; but that they treat me with such disfavor without a valid reason is opposed to the well-known goodness of his Majesty.' "

" Indeed," said the King, " this concerns me."

" ' If you could know how dull we are! Ah, my friend, these gardens of Neauflette, this residence of Vauvert, these groves—I wander in them all day long. I have forbidden any raking. Yesterday the indifferent gardener

came with his old iron-tipped broom-handle. He was going to smooth the sand; however, the traces of your footsteps, lighter than the wind, were not effaced. The tips of your little feet, and your white satin heels, were still marked in the path; they seemed to advance before me, as I followed your beautiful image, and this charming phantom at moments became endowed with life, as if it had alighted upon the fleeing footprints. It was there, during our conversations along the garden walks, that I learned to know you and to appreciate you. An admirable education with the spirit of an angel, the dignity of a queen with the grace of nymphs, thoughts worthy of Liebnitz with a language so simple, the bee of Plato on the lips of Diana—all this enraptured me with a spirit of adoration. And during those precious moments those beloved flowers were blooming around us. I breathed their perfume as I listened to you; in their fragrance your memory lived. Now their heads are bowed; they present to me the appearance of death.' "

" This is some of Rousseau's trash," said the King. " Why do you read such stuff to me? "

" Because your Majesty ordered me to, for the sake of the beautiful eyes of Mademoiselle d'Annebault."

" That is true; she has beautiful eyes."

" ' And when I return from these wanderings,

I find my father alone, in the grand salon, leaning on his elbow, near the lighted candle, in the midst of the faded gilding which covers our worm-eaten panels. He sees me with pain; my sorrow awakens his. Athenais! At the end of this salon, near the window, is the harpsichord over whose keys danced your dainty fingers, which once my lips touched, while yours parted gently to set free strains of sweetest music, in such manner that your song was but a smile. How happy are they, this Rameau, this Lulli, this Duni, and so many others! Yes, yes, you love them; they dwell in your memory, they breathe upon your lips. I, too, sit down at this instrument; I try to play one of those airs which please you—how cold it seems to me, how monotonous! I stop, and listen to the sounds dying away, as the echo becomes lost under this gloomy roof. My father turns, and sees me thus dejected, but what can he do? Some gossip of the street, or of the antechamber, has barred our way into the world. He sees me young, ardent, full of life, asking nothing but to be in the world. He is my father, and can do nothing.' "

" One would suppose," said the King, " that this young fellow was out hunting, and some one had killed his falcon on his wrist? Pray you, against whom is he complaining? "

" ' It is quite true,' " went on the marquise, continuing her reading in a lower tone, " ' it is

quite true that we are near neighbors and distant relatives of the Abbé Chauvelin . . .'"

"There it is," said Louis XV, yawning, "always some relative or other looking for favors. My Parliament abuses my good nature; it has altogether too large a family."

"But if he is only a distant relative . . ."

"Well, these people are no good. This Abbé Chauvelin is a Jansenist; he is a good fellow, but one of those who resigned. Throw the letter into the fire, and let nothing more be said about it."

II

THE last words of the King were not exactly a sentence of death, but came near being a prohibition to live. What could be done, in 1756, by a young man without means, whom the King will not allow to be mentioned? Shall he try to be a clerk, or become a philosopher, or perhaps a poet? But in this case, without official patronage, the calling would be of no value.

Such was not by any means the vocation of the Chevalier de Vauvert, who had written, with tears, the letter which the King derided. At this very time, alone with his father in the old château of Neauflette, he was pacing up and down the room with a fierce and gloomy air.

"I will go to Versailles," he was saying.

"And what will you do there?"

"I do not know; but what do I here?"

"You keep me company. Certainly that can not be very amusing for you, and I will not detain you in any way. But do you forget that your mother is dead?"

"No, sir; and I have promised to devote to you the life which you gave me. I will come back again, but I wish to go away now. I can not remain here any longer."

"What is the reason of this?"

"I am desperately in love. I love Mademoiselle d'Annebault to distraction."

"You know that it is useless. It is only Molière who would marry without a dowry. Do you forget, too, my disgrace?"

"Ah, sir, your disgrace—may I, without failing in the deep respect I owe you, ask what has caused it? We are not in the Parliament. We pay the tax; we do not collect it. If the Parliament quarrels over the King's funds, that is their affair, not ours. Why should the Abbé Chauvelin drag us to ruin with himself?"

"The Abbé Chauvelin acts like an honest man. He refuses to approve of the tithe, because he is disgusted at the waste of the court. There would never have been anything like this in the time of Madame de Chateauroux. She was beautiful, at least, that woman, and she cost us nothing, not even what she gave away so generously. She was mistress and supreme, and

said she would be satisfied if the King did not send her to languish in a prison when he withdrew his favor from her. But this Étioles, this le Normand, this insatiable Poisson!"

"What does it matter?"

"What does it matter, do you say? More than you think. Do you know that, at present, while the King plunders us, the fortune of this woman is incalculable? She made them give her, in the beginning, an income of 180,000 livres; but that was a mere bagatelle; that does not count now. It would be impossible to form an idea of the enormous sums which the King throws at her feet; there does not pass three months in the year when she does not catch in its flight, as if by chance, five or six thousand livres, one day from the salt tax, another from the appropriation for the treasurer of the royal stables. Although she has apartments in the royal palaces, she buys La Selle, Cressy, Aulnay, Brimborion, Marigny, St. Remy, Bellevue, and a number of other estates; also residences at Paris, Fontainebleau, Versailles, Compiègne, without counting a secret fortune placed in the banks of every country of Europe, to be used in case of her disgrace, or of the King's death. And who pays for all that, if you please?"

"I do not know, sir, but it is not I."

"It is you, the same as every one else; it is France; it is the people who sweat blood and

water, who cry in the streets, who insult the statue of Pigalle. Parliament can no longer endure this and will tolerate no more new taxes. When it was a question of war expenses, our last crown was ready; we did not think of bargaining. The victorious King could see plainly that he was loved by the whole nation; still more plainly when he came near dying. Then ceased every difference of opinion, every faction, all rancour; all France was on its knees beside the bed of the King, and prayed for him. But if we pay, without reckoning, his soldiers and his physicians, we are not willing to pay for his mistresses, and we have other things to do with our money than to support Madame de Pompadour."

"I do not defend her, sir. I could not decide for or against her; I have never seen her."

"Without doubt; and you would not be sorry to see her, would you, that you might form some opinion of her? For at your age, the head judges by the eyes. Try it now, if it seems good to you. But the pleasure will be denied you."

"Why, sir?"

"Because it is a piece of folly; because this marquise is as invisible in her little boudoirs at Brimborion as the Grand Turk in his seraglio; because they will shut every door in your face. What would you do—attempt the impossible? Seek your fortune as an adventurer?"

"Not so, but as a lover. I do not intend to ask for favors, sir, but to protest against an injustice. I had a well-founded hope, almost a promise, from M. de Biron. I was on the point of obtaining the object of my love, and this love is not a foolish one; you have not disapproved of it. Permit me now to attempt to plead my cause. Whether I shall have to deal with the King or Madame de Pompadour I do not know, but I wish to set out."

"You are not acquainted at the court, and you wish to present yourself there?"

"Ah, perhaps I shall be the more easily received, for the very fact that I am unknown."

"You unknown, chevalier! What are you thinking of? With a name like yours . . . We are of the old nobility, sir; you could not be unknown."

"Well, then, the King shall hear me."

"He will not even listen to you. You dream of Versailles, and imagine you will be there when your postilion halts. Suppose you get so far as the antechamber, the gallery, or the Œil-de-Bœuf, you will not see between his Majesty and yourself but the swinging of a door; there will be an abyss. You will turn round; you will seek expedients, for patrons, and will find none. We are relatives of M. de Chauvelin. And how do you think the King takes vengeance? By the torture for Damiens; by exile for the Parlia-

ment; but for us, by a word, or, worse still, by silence. Do you know what this silence of the King is like, when with mute regard, instead of replying to you, he stares into your face as he passes by and reduces you to nothing? Next in degree to the Grève and the Bastile, it is a kind of punishment which, less cruel in appearance, marks as truly as the hand of the executioner. The condemned, it is true, remains free, but he may no longer think of going near a woman, a courtier, a salon, an abbey, or a barracks. Before him everything turns away or is closed, and thus he walks everywhere in an invisible prison."

"I will move around so much that I will get out."

"No more than any one else. The son of M. de Meynières was no more guilty than you. He had, like you, promises, and most legitimate hopes. His father, the most devoted subject of his Majesty, the most honest man in the kingdom, repulsed by the King, went with his gray hairs, not to beg, but to try to persuade the woman. Do you know what she replied? Here are her very words, which M. de Meynières sent me in a letter: 'The King is our master; he does not think proper to show his displeasure against you personally, but contents himself with making you feel it by depriving your son of a position; to punish you otherwise would be to com-

mence a prosecution, and he does not wish that. It is necessary to respect his wishes. Still, I am sorry for you; I sympathize with you; I have been a mother; I know what it must cost you to leave your son without means of support.' That is the style of this creature, and you wish to put yourself at her feet!"

"It is said they are charming, sir."

"Parbleu! yes. She is not pretty, and it is known that the King does not love her. Yet he yields, he gives way before this woman. To maintain her strange power, it is necessary that she have something more than her wooden head."

"They claim that she has a good deal of wit."

"And no heart . . . a great merit!"

"No heart! She who knows so well how to declaim the verses of Voltaire and sing the music of Rousseau! She who personates Alzire and Colette! It is impossible; I will never believe it."

"Go, then, and see, since you wish it. I advise, and do not command, but your traveling expenses will go for nothing. You love this Mademoiselle d'Annebault very much?"

"More than my life."

"Go, sir."

III

They say that traveling weakens love, because it distracts the mind; they also say it strengthens love, because it gives time for dreaming. The

chevalier was too young to make such fine distinctions. Tired of his carriage when half-way on his journey, he had taken a post-horse, and arrived about five o'clock in the afternoon at the inn with the sign of the Sun, a symbol now somewhat out of style, which belonged to the time of Louis XIV.

There was at Versailles an old priest who had been a curé of a church near Neauflette; the chevalier knew him and loved him. This curé, poor and simple, had a nephew who held an appointment as an abbé of the court, who therefore might be useful to him. The chevalier went now to the nephew, a man of imposing appearance and in his priestly garb, who received the newcomer well, and did not disdain to listen to his request.

"Parbleu!" said he, "you come at a good time. There is at the court this evening an opera, a fête of some kind, I do not know just what. I am not going, as I am avoiding the marquise just now, in order to obtain something from her; but here is a line from Duke d'Aumont, which I asked of him for somebody else, but never mind, you can have it. Go the the fête. It is true you have not yet been presented, but for the entertainment that is not necessary. Try to place yourself near the King when he passes into the anteroom. A glance, and your fortune is made."

The chevalier thanked the abbé, and, weary from an ill-slept night and a journey on horseback, he made, before the mirror at the inn, one of those careless toilets which so well become lovers. An inexperienced servant helped him as well as she was able, covering his spangled coat with powder. Thus, at the age of twenty summers, he started out on the road to try his fortune.

Night was falling when he arrived at the château. He advanced timidly toward the gate and asked his way of a sentinel. They pointed out to him the grand staircase. There he learned of a Swiss that the opera had just begun, and that the King—that is to say, everybody—was in the hall.*

"If M. le Marquis will cross the court," added the Swiss (at all events, they gave the title of marquis), "he will be at the spectacle in an instant. If he prefers to pass through the apartments . . ."

The chevalier was not acquainted with the palace. Curiosity led him to promptly reply that he would go through the apartments; then, as the lackey prepared to follow, to show him the

* This does not refer to the existing hall, constructed by Louis XV, or rather by Madame de Pompadour, but completed only in 1769 and opened in 1770 for the marriage of the Duc de Berri (Louis XVI) with Marie Antoinette. It was a sort of movable theater, which was set up in a gallery or apartment, in accordance with the custom of Louis XIV.

way, an impulse of vanity induced him to add that there was no need of accompanying him. So, not without emotion, he proceeded alone.

Versailles was resplendent with lights. From top to bottom glittered sconces, chandeliers, gilded furniture, and marble. With the exception of the Queen's apartments, the doors were everywhere wide open. As the chevalier advanced he was struck with an astonishment and admiration difficult to conceive; for what rendered altogether marvelous the scene spread before him was not merely the beauty nor the splendor of his surroundings, but it was the complete solitude in which he found himself in the midst of this sort of enchanted desert.

To find oneself alone in a vast enclosure, whether it be a temple, a cloister, or a castle has in it something strange, and even a mysterious feeling. The edifice seems to weigh upon the individual. The walls watch him; the echoes listen to him; the sound of his step disturbs a silence so deep that he feels an involuntary fear, and only ventures to advance with respect.

Thus at first did the chevalier; but soon curiosity gained the upper hand and drew him on. The candelabra of the Gallery of Mirrors by their reflections multiplied the lights. One knows how many thousands of loves, nymphs, and shepherdesses sported upon the paneling, floated upon the ceilings, and seemed to enfold

the whole palace in an immense garland. Here were vast halls with canopies of velvet sprinkled with gold, and chairs of state still preserving the majestic stiffness of the great King; there were disordered ottomans, and folding-chairs in confusion around a card-table. An endless succession of halls, always vacant, where the magnificence only shone the more brilliantly as it seemed the more useless. From time to time private doors opening upon the corridors at random; a thousand staircases, a thousand passages crossing as in a labyrinth; columns and corridors constructed as if for giants; a maize of boudoirs like hiding-places for children. An enormous painting by Vanloo was near a chimney-place of porphyry, a forgotten box of mouches lying beside a grotesque figure of Chinese workmanship —now an overwhelming grandeur, now an effeminate grace; and everywhere in the midst of the luxury, of the prodigality and effeminacy, a thousand intoxicating odors, strange and diverse, the mingled perfumes of flowers and women, an enervating sultriness, an atmosphere of sensuality.

To be in such a place in the midst of such marvels, at the age of twenty, and to be there alone, was certainly enough to dazzle one. The chevalier moved as in a dream.

"A veritable fairy palace!" murmured he; and indeed it seemed to him as if he beheld the

realization of one of those tales in which errant princes discover magic castles.

Were they assuredly mortals who dwelt in this unparalleled abode? Were they real women who had just been sitting in these armchairs, and whose graceful figures had left upon these cushions that light impression so suggestive even yet of indolence? Who knew but behind the heavy curtains at the end of some immense and brilliant gallery, perhaps, there would appear a princess, asleep for the last hundred years, a fairy in hoop-skirts, an Armida in spangles, or some hamadryad of the court, coming from a marble column, or emerging from one of the gilded panels!

Bewildered, in spite of himself, by all these chimeras, the chevalier, to dream better, had thrown himself upon a sofa, and might perhaps have forgotten himself there for a long time had he not recalled the fact that he was in love. What was his beloved, Mademoiselle d'Annebault, doing at this hour, in the old château in which she dwelt?

"Athenais!" cried he suddenly, "why am I here, wasting my time? Is my reason unsettled? Great God! what am I about, and what is the matter with me?"

He arose, and continued his way through this unknown country, and of course lost his way. Two or three lackeys, talking in low tones, ap-

peared at the end of a gallery. He approached them and inquired the way to the play.

"If M. le Marquis," they replied (still the same formula), "will trouble himself to descend this staircase and follow the gallery to the right, he will find at the end three steps to mount. He will then turn to the left, and when he has traversed the Salon of Diana, that of Apollo, of the Muses, and of Spring, he will again descend six steps; then, leaving the guard's hall on the right, and crossing to the minister's staircase, he can not fail to meet there other ushers, who will show him the way."

"I am much obliged," said the chevalier, "and with such good directions it will be my own fault if I do not find my way."

He started on again with courage, stopping every now and then, in spite of himself, to look from one side to the other, to be recalled to himself anew by the memory of his love. At length, at the end of a full quarter of an hour, he again found, as he had been told, a group of lackeys.

"M. le Marquis is mistaken," said they to him; "it is the other wing of the château which he should have taken. However, nothing could be easier than to retrace his steps. Monsieur has only to descend these stairs, then he will cross through the Salon of Nymphs, that of Summer, that of . . ."

"I thank you," said the chevalier. "And I am stupid enough," thought he, "to thus question people like a booby. I bring shame on myself to no purpose; and even supposing, though it is not likely, they do not make fun of me, what serve me their words, and all the pompous sobriquets of these halls, of which I know not one?"

He adopted the plan of going straight ahead, as far as he could. "For, after all," said he to himself, "this palace is very beautiful, and it is very large, but it is not without limits, and were it three times as long as our warren, I must come to the end of it."

But it is not easy, at Versailles, to go straight ahead for any length of time; and this rustic comparison of the royal dwelling with a country-place perhaps displeased the nymphs of the locality, for they began once more to completely lead astray the poor lover, and, no doubt to punish him, they took pleasure in making him turn and retrace his own steps, continually leading him back to the same place, just like a countryman lost in the labyrinth of marble and gold.

In the "Antiquities of Rome," by Piranesi, there is a series of engravings which the artist calls "his dreams," and which are supposed to reproduce his own visions during the delirium of a fever. These engravings represent vast Gothic halls; upon the floor are all kinds of engines

and machines, wheels, cables, pulleys, levers, catapults, etc., the expression of enormous power put in action, and of formidable resistance. Beside the wall you perceive a staircase, and upon this staircase, climbing not without difficulty, Piranesi himself. Follow the steps a little higher, and they suddenly stop short before an abyss. Whatever may become of poor Piranesi, you believe, at least, he has reached the end of his labor, for he can not take another step without falling. But lift your eyes, and you will see a second staircase which ascends into air, and upon these stairs, again Piranesi on the brink of another precipice. Look again, still higher, and another staircase rises before you, and again poor Piranesi continuing his upward struggle; and so on, until this eternal staircase and Piranesi disappear together in the clouds, that is to say, in the border of the engraving.

This feverish allegory represents accurately enough the weariness of unavailing toil, and the species of vertigo impatience produces. The chevalier, wandering ever from salon to salon and from gallery to gallery, at last became thoroughly exasperated.

"Parbleu!" said he, "this is cruel. After being so charmed, so enraptured, so enthusiastic to find myself alone in this cursed palace" (it was no longer a fairy palace). "I am now unable to get out! Plague take the fatuity which

inspired me with the idea of entering here like the Prince Fanfarinet with his boots of gold, instead of telling the first lackey I met to lead me straight to the hall of entertainment!"

When these tardy regrets came to him, the chevalier was like Piranesi, half-way up a staircase, on a landing facing three doors. Behind the middle one he seemed to hear a murmur so soft, so light, so voluptuous, that one could not help listening. At the moment that he advanced, trembling, to lend an indiscreet ear, this door swung open. A breath of air scented with a thousand perfumes, a torrent of light which would have paled the Gallery of Mirrors, came forth so suddenly, that he recoiled some steps.

"Does M. le Marquis wish to enter?" asked the usher who had opened the door.

"I wish to go to the play," replied the chevalier.

"It is this very moment finished."

At the same time a group of beautiful women, delicately painted with white and carmine, escorted by gentlemen old and young (who led them, giving not the arm, nor even the hand, but the tips of their fingers), began to file from the hall of entertainment, taking great care to walk sideways to avoid injuring their hoop-skirts. All these brilliant people were speaking in low tones, with semi-gaiety, mingled with awe and respect.

"What is going on now?" said the chevalier, not divining that chance had led him to the antechamber itself.

"The King is about to pass," replied the usher.

There is a kind of intrepidity which fears nothing; it finds things only too easy. It is the courage of ignorance. Our young provincial, though he was reasonably brave, did not possess this quality. At the mere words, "The King is about to pass," he stood motionless and almost terror-stricken.

King Louis XV, who would ride, when out hunting, a dozen leagues without taking notice of anything, was, it is well known, supremely indifferent. He boasted, not without reason, that he was the first gentleman of France; and his mistresses told him, not without cause, that he was the best built and the handsomest. It was a notable thing, even, to see him leave his armchair and condescend to walk alone. When he passed through the anteroom, with an arm placed, or rather laid, upon the shoulder of M. d'Argenson, while his red heel glided over the floor (he had made this bit of indolence the fashion), all whispering ceased. The courtiers bent their heads, not daring to actually bow, and the fine ladies, drawing back slightly in the midst of their immense furbelows, ventured upon that coquettish salutation which our grandmothers

called a courtesy, and which our times have replaced by the vulgar hand-shake of the English.

But the King cared for nothing, and saw only what pleased him. Perhaps Alfieri was there, who thus describes, in his memoirs, his presentation at Versailles:

"I knew that the King never spoke to strangers who were not people of note, yet I could not accustom myself to the impassible and haughty mien of Louis XV. He eyed from top to toe the man presented to him, and had the air of being not at all impressed. Yet it seems to me that if one should say to a giant, 'Here is an ant which I present to you,' looking at it, he would smile, or would perhaps say, 'Ah, the little animal!'"

The taciturn monarch passed now through the midst of these flowers of feminine loveliness, and all his court, preserving solitude in all the crowd. The chevalier needed no long reflections to comprehend that he had nothing to hope from the King, and that the recital of his love would win no success here.

"Unfortunate that I am!" thought he; "my father was only too correct when he said that, at two steps from the King, I should see an abyss between him and me. Even if I dared beg an audience, who would protect me, who would present me? There he is, this absolute master who can with a word change my destiny, assure my

fortune, and fulfil all my wishes. He is there before me; by reaching out my hand I could touch his sleeve; and I feel farther away from him than if I were still in the depths of my native province! If I could but speak to him—approach him! Who will now come to my aid?"

While the chevalier was thus lamenting, he saw enter a young lady, rather pretty, with an air full of grace and elegance; she was clothed very simply, in a white dress, without diamonds or embroideries, and with a single rose in her hair. She had given her hand to a gentleman *tout a l'ambre*, and was talking to him in a low voice behind her fan. But as chance would have it, as she chatted, laughing and gesticulating, this fan slipped from her fingers and fell beneath a chair precisely in front of the chevalier. He immediately stooped to pick it up, and as he went down on his knee to do so, the young lady appeared so charming that he presented the fan to her without rising. She paused, smiled, and passed on, thanking him with a slight nod of the head. But at the glance which she had given the chevalier he felt his heart beat, without knowing why. He had good reason. This young lady was *la petite D'Etioles*, as the malcontents stilled called her, while others, speaking of her, said "the Marquise," in that reverent tone as one would say "the Queen."

IV

"SHE will assist me—she will come to my aid! Ah, but the abbé was right in saying that a look would decide my fate! Yes, those eyes, so clear and sweet, that little mouth, mocking and delightful, that little foot hidden beneath the bunch of ribbon . . . it is my good fairy!"

Thus ran the thoughts of the chevalier, almost uttered aloud, as he entered the inn. Whence came to him this sudden hope? Did youth alone speak, or had the eyes of the marquise spoken?

But there was still the same difficulty. Though he no longer thought of being presented to the King, he must yet consider who would present him to the marquise.

He spent a great part of the night in writing to Mademoiselle d'Annebault a letter much the same as that which Madame de Pompadour had read. To quote this letter would be quite useless. Excepting fools, only lovers can always find something new in continually reiterating the same thing.

In the morning the chevalier went out to walk through the streets as one in a dream. He had no desire to resort once more to the protecting abbé, and did not find it easy to give the reason. It was a feeling of mingled fear and audacity, of false shame and romantic honor. And,

indeed, what would the abbé have replied to him if he had narrated the history of the preceding evening? "You had an opportunity to pick up a fan; did you know how to profit by it? What did you say to the marquise?" "Nothing." "You should have spoken to her." "I was confused; I had lost my head." "That is too bad. One should know how to seize the favorable moment. But perchance it can be remedied. Would you like me to present you to Monsieur So-and-so? He is a friend of mine. To Madame So-and-so? She is better still. We will try to bring you to this marquise who frightened you so," and so forth.

But the chevalier relished nothing of this kind. It seemed to him that, in relating his adventure, he would mar and spoil it. He said to himself that chance had accomplished for him an unheard-of and incredible thing, and that it ought to be a secret between himself and fortune; to confide this secret to the first comer was, in his opinion, to deprive it of all value, and show himself unworthy of it. "I went alone, yesterday, to the château of Versailles," thought he; "I will go alone also to Trianon." (This was, at the moment, the residence of the favorite.)

Such a manner of thinking may, and even ought to appear extravagant to calculating minds, who neglect nothing and leave as little as possible to chance; but the coolest of people,

if they have been young (every one has not, even in the time of youth), have known this feeling, weak, yet bold, dangerous, and seductive, which draws us on to our fate. We feel ourselves blind, and wish to be so; we know not whither we go, and yet proceed. The charm is in this very heedlessness and ignorance; it is the pleasure of the artist who dreams, of the lover who spends the night beneath the window of his mistress. It is also the instinct of the soldier; it is especially that of the gambler.

The chevalier, almost without perceiving it, took the road to Trianon. Without being dressed in the height of fashion, he did not lack either in elegance or in that manner which restrains a lackey, who meets one on the road, from asking where one is going. Thanks to some directions obtained at the inn, it was not difficult to make his way to the gate of the château—if one may thus call this marble *bonbonnière* which formerly witnessed so many cares and pleasures. Unhappily, the gate was closed, and a stout Swiss, wearing a simple overcoat, with hands behind his back, paced up and down the inner avenue like a person who was not expecting any one.

"The King is here," said the chevalier to himself, "or the marquise is not. It is evident, when gates are closed and valets promenade, that the masters are either shut in or gone away."

What was to be done? He felt, all at once,

an uneasiness and disappointment as great as the confidence and courage which had inspired him but an instant before. The mere thought, "The King is here," terrified him more than had the words, "The King is about to pass," the evening before; for he knew now, as he did not then, that cold regard, that impassible majesty.

"Ah, good God! how should I face him if I heedlessly attempted to enter this garden, and should find myself before this superb monarch, sipping his coffee beside some stream?"

And immediately, before the poor lover, a disagreeable picture of the Bastile replaced the charming image he had retained of the marquise as she passed by. He beheld guard-rooms and dungeons, and the prison fare of black bread and water. He was acquainted with the story of Latude. Little by little there came reflection, and little by little disappeared his hope.

"And yet," he said to himself, "I am doing nothing wrong, nor harm to the King. I protest against an injustice; I have never criticised any one. They treated me so well at Versailles, yesterday, and the lackeys were so polite! Of what am I afraid? Of doing some foolish act? I will do other things which will repair this one."

He approached the gate and tried it gently; it was not quite shut. He opened it and entered resolutely. The Swiss turned with an air of weariness.

"What do you want? Where are you going?"

"I am going to Madame de Pompadour."

"Have you an appointment?"

"Yes."

"Where is your letter?"

He was no longer the marquis of the evening before, and this time the Duc d'Aumont would not help him. The chevalier ruefully lowered his eyes and perceived that his white stockings and rhinestone buckles were covered with dust. He had committed the fault of traveling on foot in a country where people did not walk. The Swiss lowered his eyes also and scrutinized him, not from head to foot, but from foot to head. The dress was proper enough, but the hat was a little bit sideways, and the hair lacked powder.

"You have no letter. What do you want?"

"I wish to speak to Madame de Pompadour."

"Indeed! And you think this is the way to do it?"

"I know nothing about it. Is the King here?"

"Perhaps. Go away, and leave me alone."

The chevalier did not wish to lose his temper, but, in spite of himself, the insolence made him turn pale.

"I have sometimes ordered a lackey to go away," he responded, "but a lackey has never said it to me."

"Lackey! I a lackey!" cried the Swiss furiously.

"Lackey, porter, valet, or whatever you may be, I do not care which; it makes no difference to me."

The Swiss made a step toward the chevalier, his hands clenched, his face aflame. The chevalier, recalled to himself by the menacing attitude, lightly raised the hilt of his sword.

"Take care!" said he. "I am a gentleman, and it costs thirty-six livres to put out of the way a boor like you."

"If you are a gentleman, monsieur, I am in the service of the King; I am only doing my duty, so do not imagine . . ."

At this moment the sound of a fanfare, which seemed to come from the wood of Satory, was heard in the distance, and lost in the echo. The chevalier let his sword fall back into the scabbard, and, no longer thinking of the quarrel he had begun, said:

"Ah, morbleu! it is the king starting out to hunt. Why did you not tell me directly?"

"That does not concern me, nor you either?"

"Listen to me, my dear friend. The King is not there. I have no letter, I have no appointment. Take this, and let me go in."

He took from his pocket a few gold pieces. The Swiss once more gazed at him in sovereign contempt.

"What is that?" he said disdainfully. "Is this the way one gets into a royal residence? Take care I do not shut you in, instead of making you go."

"You scoundrel!" said the chevalier, becoming angry once more, and again grasping his sword.

"Yes, I!" repeated the stout man. But during this conversation, where the historian regrets to have compromised his hero, heavy clouds had obscured the sky; a storm was coming up. A lightning flash gleamed, followed by a violent clap of thunder, and the rain began to descend heavily. The chevalier, who still held his gold, saw on his dusty shoe a drop of water as large as a half crown.

"The deuce!" said he, "let us get under shelter. There is no reason why we should be drenched." And he lightly made his way toward the cave of Cerberus, or, if you prefer, the gatekeeper's lodge, and threw himself unceremoniously into the gatekeeper's chair.

"Heavens! how tired you make me," said he, "and how unfortunate I am! You take me for a conspirator, and do not comprehend that I have in my pocket a petition for the King! I am a provincial, but you are a fool."

The Swiss, for sole reply, went to a corner to get his halberd, and remained standing, weapon in hand.

"When are you going?" he cried in a stentorian voice.

The quarrel, alternately forgotten and taken up again, now seemed to have become really serious, and the great hands of the Swiss trembled strangely on his pike. What might have happened I do not know, when, suddenly turning his head, the chevalier said, "Ah, who comes there?"

A young page, mounted on a superb horse (not English; at this time thin legs were not in fashion), was galloping at full speed. The road was soaked with the rain; the gate was open only a little way. He hesitated; the Swiss advanced and opened the gate. The page used his spurs; the horse, which had halted for an instant, tried to resume his pace, missed his footing, slipped on the moist earth, and fell.

It is not very easy, but almost dangerous, to help up a horse which has fallen. The whip does not avail here. The movements of the legs of the animal, which is doing all it can, are extremely disagreeable, especially if one's own leg is caught under the saddle.

The chevalier nevertheless went to his assistance, without reflecting upon these unpleasant possibilities, and took hold so adroitly that the horse was soon standing upright, and the rider freed. But this latter was covered with mud, and could scarcely limp along. Reaching as best

he could the house of the Swiss, and taking possession, in his turn, of the big chair, he said to the chevalier:

"Monsieur, you are certainly a gentleman. You have rendered me a great service, but you can render me one greater still. Here is a message from the King for Madame la Marquise, which is very urgent, as you may perceive, since my horse and I have almost broken our necks trying to go more quickly. You see that, in the condition I am, with a lame leg, I can not carry the paper. For that, it would be necessary to be carried myself. Will you go in my place?"

At the same time he drew from his pocket a large envelope, decorated with gilt figures, and bearing the royal seal.

"Very willingly, monsieur," replied the chevalier, taking the envelope. And, quick and light as a feather, he set out on a run.

V

When the chevalier arrived at the château he found another Swiss stationed before the peristyle.

"By order of the King," said the young man, who feared no halberds this time; and showing his letter, he gaily entered past half a dozen lackeys.

A tall usher, standing in the middle of the vestibule, on seeing the King's writing, and the royal seal, bowed gravely, like a poplar-tree bent by the wind; then, smiling, he touched with a bony finger a corner of the wainscot.

A little swinging door, masked by hangings, opened as of its own accord. The gaunt man signed courteously to him; the chevalier entered, and the hangings, which had been drawn aside, fell together softly behind him.

A silent *valet de chambre* here led him into a salon, then to a corridor upon which opened two or three little cabinets, and after that into a second salon, where he begged him to wait a moment.

"Am I still in the château of Versailles?" the chevalier asked himself. "Are we to recommence the game of hide-and-seek?"

Trianon was at this time neither what it is now nor what it had been. It has been said that Madame de Maintenon made of Versailles a chapel, and Madame de Pompadour a boudoir. It has also been said of Trianon that "this little porcelain château" was the boudoir of Madame de Montespan. However it may be about all these boudoirs, it seems that Louis XV put them everywhere. A certain gallery, where his grandfather had been accustomed to promenade majestically, thus was fantastically divided into an infinity of apartments. They were there in every color.

The King fluttered about in these bowers of silk and velvet. "Do you find my little apartments furnished in good taste?" he asked one day of the beautiful Countess de Séran. "No," said she, "I would prefer them in blue." As blue was the royal color, this response flattered him. The next time she was there Madame de Séran found the salon furnished in blue, as she had wished.

The one in which, at this moment, the chevalier found himself, was neither blue, nor white, nor rose, but with walls completely covered with mirrors. One knows how much a pretty woman, who has a fine figure, gains by having her image repeated thus under a thousand different aspects. She dazzles, she enfolds, so to speak, the one she wishes to please. In whatever direction he looks, he sees her; how can he avoid it? There is nothing for him to do but to flee, or own himself subjugated.

The chevalier observed the garden also. There, beneath the bowers and labyrinths, the statues and vases of marble, began to appear the pastoral taste which the marquise was to make fashionable, and which, later, Madame DuBarry, and Queen Marie Antoinette were to push to such a high degree of perfection. Already were to be seen the rural fantasies in which the palled caprice took refuge. Already the puffing tritons, grave goddesses and learned nymphs, and

busts with great wigs, saw emerge from the earth an English garden in the midst of astonished yew-trees. The little grass plots, the little streams with little bridges, were soon to dethrone Olympus, to replace it by a dairy; a strange parody of nature, which the English copy without comprehending; a true child's play, became the pastime of an indolent master, who did not know how to escape the ennui of Versailles while remaining in Versailles itself.

But the chevalier was too delighted, too carried away at being there, for a critical reflection to find a place in his mind. He was, on the contrary, ready to admire everything, and he was admiring it, turning his missive in his fingers as a countryman does his hat, when a pretty chambermaid opened the door and spoke softly:

" Come, monsieur."

He followed her, and after having passed through several new corridors more or less mysterious, she led him into a large room, where the shutters were half closed. There she paused and seemed to listen.

" Still hide-and-go-seek," said the chevalier to himself.

However, at the end of a few seconds another door opened, and another chambermaid, who seemed to be as pretty as the first, repeated in the same tone the same words

" Come, monsieur."

If he was moved at Versailles, he was not less so here, though in a very different manner, for he understood that he was on the threshold of a temple where dwelt divinity. He advanced with a beating heart. A soft light, veiled slightly by thin curtains of gauze, succeeded the obscurity; a delicious perfume, almost imperceptible, floated in the air about him. The chambermaid timidly put aside the corner of a silken portière, and at the end of a large salon furnished with elegant simplicity he beheld the lady of the fan—that is to say, the all-powerful marquise.

She was alone, seated before a table, wrapped in a dressing-gown, her head resting on her hand, and appeared deeply absorbed. On seeing the chevalier enter, she arose suddenly, as if involuntarily.

"You come from the King?"

The chevalier might have replied, but he could do nothing better than to bow deeply as he presented the letter which he had brought. She took it, or, rather, seized it hastily. While she was opening it, her hands trembled upon the envelope.

The letter, written by the King's hand, was quite long. She devoured it at first, one might say, with a glance; then she read it eagerly, with profound attention, her brow knit, her lips compressed. She was not beautiful thus, and no longer resembled the magic apparition of the

antechamber. When she came to an end, she appeared to reflect. Little by little, her face, which had turned pale, became tinged with pink (at this hour she did not wear rouge); not only grace returned to her, but a flash of real beauty passed over her delicate features. One might have taken her cheeks for two rose petals. She half sighed, let fall the letter upon the table, and turned to the chevalier.

"I have kept you waiting, monsieur," said she, with a charming smile, "but it was because I had not yet risen, and have not really, now. That is why I was obliged to have you come by private ways; for I am besieged here almost as much as if I were at home. I wish to return an answer to the King. Will it trouble you to take this for me?"

This time he had to speak. But the chevalier had had time to regain a little courage.

"Alas! madame," said he, dejectedly, "it is too much favor you show me; but, unhappily, I can not profit by it."

"How is that?"

"I have not the honor of being in his Majesty's service."

"How, then, did you come here?"

"By a chance. I met on the way a page who had been thrown to the ground, and who begged me . . ."

"What, thrown to the ground!" repeated the

marquise, bursting into laughter. (She appeared so light-hearted at this moment that gaiety came without effort.)

"Yes, madame; he fell from his horse at the gate. Fortunately, I happened to be there to help him up, and as his habit was much soiled, he begged me to take charge of his message."

"And by what chance did you happen to be there?"

"Madame, it was because I have a petition to present to his Majesty."

"His Majesty resides at Versailles."

"Yes, but you reside here."

"Oh, indeed! So it is you who wished to trust me with a message."

"Madame, I beg you to believe . . ."

"Do not be afraid; you are not the first. But how did you come to address yourself to me? I am only a woman, like any other." As she pronounced these words with a mocking air, the marquise cast a triumphant glance at the letter she had just read.

"Madame," replied the chevalier, "I have always heard that men exercise the power, and women . . ."

"Dispose of it, do they not? Ah, well, monsieur, there is a Queen of France."

"I know it, madame, and that is why I happened to be here this morning."

The marquise was more than accustomed to

such compliments, though they were generally spoken in a low voice, but just now it seemed to be particularly pleasing to her.

"And upon what supposition," said she, "upon what assurance, did you imagine you could come here? For you did not count, I imagine, upon a horse which was to fall in the road!"

"Madame, I believed—I hoped . . ."

"What could you hope?"

"I hoped that chance would . . ."

"Always chance! It is a friend of yours, it appears; but I warn you, if you have no others, it is a poor recommendation."

Perhaps offended Fortune wished to revenge herself for this disrespect; for the chevalier, whom these last questions had disturbed more and more, suddenly perceived upon the corner of the table the very same fan which he had picked up the evening before. He took it, and, as at that other time, presented it to the marquise with knee bent before her.

"There, madame," he said to her, "is the only friend I have here."

The marquise appeared at first astonished, then hesitated a moment, looking from the fan to the chevalier.

"Ah, you are right," said she at length; "it is you, monsieur! I remember you. It was you I saw yesterday, after the play, when I was with

M. de Richelieu. I had dropped my fan, and you happened to be there, as you said."

"Yes, madame."

"And very gallantly, like a true knight, you returned it to me. I have not thanked you, but I have always been persuaded that he who can pick up a fan with such good grace, can also, if necessary, pick up the glove; and we like that too, we women."

"And it is only too true, madame; for on arriving a while ago, I very nearly had a duel with the Swiss."

"Mercy on me!" said the marquise, seized by a second attack of merriment, "with the Swiss! And why was that?"

"He would not let me enter."

"That would have been a pity. But, monsieur, who are you? What do you want?"

"Madame, I am the Chevalier de Vauvert. M. de Biron requested for me a position as cornet in the guards."

"Oh, yes, I remember now. You come from Neauflette; you are in love with Mademoiselle d'Annebault."

"Madame, who could have told you that?"

"Oh, I warn you, I am much to be feared. When memory fails me, I divine. You are related to the Abbé Chauvelin, and were refused on that account, were you not? Where is your petition?"

"Here it is, madame; but, in truth, I do not understand . . ."

"What good would it be to understand? Rise, and put your paper on the table. I am going to reply to the King; you shall carry your request and my letter at the same time."

"But, madame, I thought you said . . ."

"You shall go. You entered here in the name of the King, did you not? Well, you shall enter there in the name of Madame de Pompadour, lady of honor to the Queen."

The Chevalier bowed in silence, seized with a sort of stupefaction. For a long time it had been known to every one how many conferences, how many ruses and intrigues the favorite had employed, and what obstinacy she had displayed, to obtain this title, which, after all, brought her nothing but a cruel affront from the Dauphin. But she had been wishing for it ten years. She wanted it, she obtained it. M. de Vauvert, whom she did not know, although she was acquainted with his love-affairs, pleased her like a good novel.

Erect and immovable before her, the chevalier watched the marquise, who wrote, at first, with ardor, with passion, then reflected, paused, and passed her hand over her little nose, dainty as amber. She became impatient; the presence of a witness annoyed her. At length she came to

a decision and made an erasure; it must be admitted that it was only a rough draft.

Facing the chevalier, on the other side of the table, shone a beautiful Venetian mirror. The timid messenger scarcely dared lift his eyes. It was, however, difficult for him not to see in this mirror, over the head of the marquise, the disturbed and charming face of the new lady of the palace.

"How pretty she is!" thought he. "It is a pity that I love another; but Athénais is more beautiful, and, besides, it would be such a frightful disloyalty on my part!"

"Of what are you speaking?" asked the marquise. (The chevalier, in accordance with his habit, had done his thinking aloud, without realizing it.) "What is it you say?"

"I, madame? I am waiting."

"That is finished," repeated the marquise, taking another sheet of paper. But at the slight movement she made in turning around, the dressing-gown had slipped from her shoulder.

Fashion is a strange thing. Our grandmothers thought nothing of going to court in immense robes with their bosoms almost entirely exposed, and it was not considered indecent, but they carefully concealed their backs, which the women of to-day exhibit at the ball or at the theater. It is a newly discovered beauty.

Upon the delicate shoulder of Madame de

Pompadour, which was white and pretty, there was a small black mark which looked like a fly floating on milk. The chevalier, serious as a madcap who wishes to keep his countenance, gazed at this spot, while the marquise, her pen suspended in air, observed the chevalier in the mirror.

In the mirror rapid glances were exchanged, which expressed on one side, "You are charming," and on the other, "I am not annoyed." Nevertheless, the marquise rearranged her dressing-gown.

"You are looking at my beauty-spot, monsieur?"

"I am not looking, madame; I am admiring."

"Here is my letter; take it to the King with your petition."

"But, madame . . ."

"What now?"

"His Majesty is hunting; I just heard his horns in the wood of Satory."

"It is true; I had forgotten. Ah, well, to-morrow, the day after to-morrow, no matter. No, immediately. Go; you will give this to Lebel. Adieu, monsieur. Try to remember that this beauty-spot which you have seen; no one in the whole country has seen it except the King. And as to your friend Chance, tell her, I beg of you, to accustom herself not to chatter to herself so loudly as awhile ago. Adieu, Chevalier!"

She touched a little bell, then, raising the billow of lace upon her sleeve, extended her bare arm to the young man.

He once more bowed, and lightly touched with his lips the rosy fingers of the marquise. She saw therein no discourtesy—far from it—but a little too much modesty.

And then the little chambermaids reappeared (the older ones had not yet risen), and standing behind them, like a shepherd in the midst of a flock of sheep, was the gaunt man, still smiling, to show him the way.

VI

Alone, buried in an old armchair in his little chamber at the Sun, the chevalier waited the next day, and then the next. No news!

"Singular woman! gentle and imperious, kind and malicious, the most frivolous and the most obstinate. She has forgotten me. Oh, misery! She is right. She can do anything, and I am nothing." He had risen and was walking up and down the room.

"Nothing. No, I am only a poor devil. How truly my father spoke. The marquise was making fun of me. It is quite simple: while I was looking at her, it was her own beauty that pleased her. She was well content to see in the mirror and in my eyes the reflection of her

charms, which are really incomparable. Yes, her eyes are small, but what grace! And Latour, before Diderot, to draw her portrait, took dust from a butterfly's wing. She is not tall, but her figure is well formed. Ah, Mademoiselle d'Annebault, ah, my dear friend, shall I, too, become forgetful?"

Two or three sharp raps upon the door roused him from his melancholy thoughts.

"What is it?"

The gaunt man, clothed entirely in black, with a beautiful pair of silk stockings, which simulated the missing calves, entered and made a grand salute.

"There will be this evening, M. le Chevalier, a masked ball at the court, and Madame la Marquise sends me to say that you are invited."

"That will do, monsieur. I thank you."

As soon as the gaunt man had departed, the chevalier ran to the bell. The same servant who three days before had done her best to assist him, aided him to don the same spangled coat, trying to do better than before. After which, the young man started for the palace, invited this time, and apparently more tranquil, but really more anxious and less bold than when he had taken his first step into this world still unknown to him.

Bewildered almost as much as the first time by all the splendors of Versailles, which this

evening was not deserted, the chevalier proceeded to the grand gallery, looking from side to side, trying to comprehend why he was there; but nobody appeared to think of accosting him. At the end of an hour he became weary and was about to depart, when two masked ladies, dressed exactly alike, seated upon an ottoman, stopped him as he passed. One of the two pointed a finger at him as if she held a pistol; the other rose and approached him.

"It appears, monsieur," said she, taking his arm nonchalantly, "that you are on very good terms with our marquise."

"I beg your pardon, madame, but of whom do you speak?"

"You know very well."

"Not the least in the world."

"Oh, yes, indeed you do!"

"Not at all."

"All the court knows it."

"I am not of the court."

"You play the child. I tell you they know it."

"That may be, madame, but I am not aware of it."

"You do not know, then, that a page fell from his horse the day before yesterday, at the gate of Trianon? Were you not there by chance?"

"Yes, madame."

"Did you not help him up?"

"Yes, madame."

"And did you not enter the château?"

"Without doubt."

"And were you not given a paper?"

"Yes, madame."

"And have you not carried it to the King?"

"Assuredly."

"The King was not at Trianon; he was out hunting. The marquise was alone, was she not?"

"Yes, madame."

"She had just risen and was scarcely dressed, excepting, as is rumored, in a loose dressing-gown."

"People who can not keep from talking, say whatever comes into their heads."

"Very well, but it seems that there passed between your eyes a look that did not annoy her."

"What do you mean by that, madame?"

"That you did not displease her."

"I know nothing about it, and I shall be mortified if a kindness so sweet and so rare, which I did not expect, and which touched me to the depths of my heart, could be the cause of ill talk."

"You are quick to anger, chevalier; one would think you were going to challenge the whole court. You would never finish killing so many people."

"But, madame, if the page fell, and I carried his message . . . Permit me to ask you why I am questioned?"

The woman pressed his arm and said to him, "Listen, monsieur."

"As much as you please, madame."

"This is what we are thinking of now. The King no longer loves the marquise, and nobody believes now that he ever loved her. She has just done an imprudent thing. She has turned out the whole Parliament, with her tax of two sous, and now she ventures to attack an even greater power, the Society of Jesuits. She will fail there; but she has weapons in her possession which she will use to defend herself."

"Well, madame, what can I do about it?"

"I am going to tell you. M. de Choiseul has half quarreled with M. de Bernis. They are not certain, either one or the other, as to what they wish to do. If Bernis goes away, Choiseul will take his place. A word from you will settle the matter."

"In what way, I beg of you?"

"By giving an account of your visit the other day."

"What connection can there be between my visit, the Jesuits, and the Parliament?"

"Write but a word for me, and the marquise is lost. And do not doubt that the liveliest interest, the most complete acknowledgment . . ."

"I beg your pardon, madame, but it is a cowardly deed you ask of me."

"Is there any valor in politics?"

"I know nothing about all that. Madame de Pompadour let fall her fan in front of me; I picked it up and returned it to her. She thanked me, and permitted me, with the grace that is hers alone, to thank her in my turn."

"A truce of ceremonies! Time flies. I am the Countess d'Estrades. You love Mademoiselle d'Annebault, my niece; do not deny it; it is useless. You ask for a position as cornet; you shall have it to-morrow, and if Athénais pleases you, you shall be my nephew."

"Oh, madame, how good you are!"

"But you must speak."

"No, madame."

"They told me that you loved the little girl."

"As much as one can love; but when I avow my love to her, my honor must go with it."

"You are very obstinate, chevalier. Is that your final answer?"

"It is the last, as it was the first."

"You refuse to enter the guards? You refuse the hand of my niece?"

"Yes, madame, if it is at this price."

Madame d'Estrades cast a piercing look at the chevalier, full of curiosity; then, seeing in his face no sign of hesitation, she left him slowly and disappeared in the crowd.

The chevalier, unable to understand this strange adventure, went and sat down in a corner of the gallery.

"What does this woman intend to do?" he said to himself. "She must be a little bit crazy. She expects to upset the state by means of a stupid calumny, and proposes that I dishonor myself, to win the hand of her niece. But Athénais would have nothing more to do with me; and if she should lend herself to such an intrigue, it would be I that would refuse her. What, try to destroy this good marquise, to defame her, to blacken her character? Never! no, never!"

Ever true to his nature, the chevalier was probably about to rise and speak his thoughts aloud, when a little rose-colored finger touched him lightly on the shoulder. He raised his eyes and saw before him the two similar masks who had previously stopped him.

"Then you will not aid us a little?" said one of the ladies, disguising her voice.

But while the two costumes were exactly alike, and everything seemed calculated to mislead, the chevalier was not deceived. The look and the accent were no longer the same.

"Will you speak, monsieur?"

"No, madame."

"Will you write?"

"Not at all."

"It is true that you are obstinate. Good evening, lieutenant."

"What do you say, madame?"

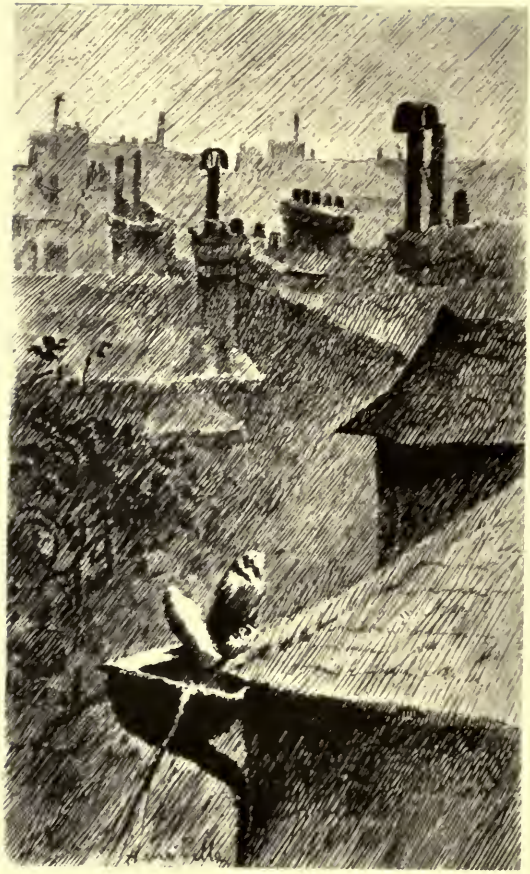
"Here is your commission, and your marriage contract." And she tossed her fan to him.

It was the one which the chevalier had already twice picked up. The little cupids, by Boucher, frolicked over the parchment in the midst of the gilded mother-of-pearl. There was no room for doubt; it was Madame de Pompadour's fan.

"Oh, heavens! madame, how can I reply . . ."

"There is no need. You are a gallant man; and we shall meet again, for you are with us. The King has placed you in the White Company. You know, for one who seeks a favor, there is no greater eloquence than a knowledge of keeping silence at the right time. And pardon us," she added, laughing, as she departed, "if, before bestowing upon you the hand of our niece, we have made some inquiries,* to ascertain your true worth."

* Madame d'Estrades, a short time afterward, was disgraced, with M. d'Argenson, for plotting, this time in earnest, against Madame de Pompadour.



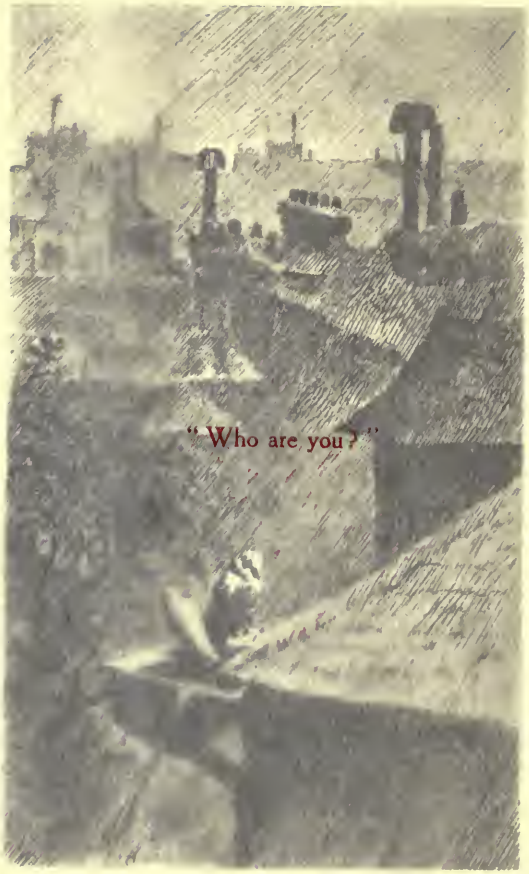
THE WHITE BLACKBIRD

I

How glorious, and yet ofttimes how painful, it is to be an exception! I am not a bird of incredible origin; on the contrary, Monsieur de Buffon has described and classified me. But alas! I am extremely rare and difficult to find. Would to Heaven I were unknown!

My father and mother were good honest people, who lived for a number of years in an old garden near Marsia. Theirs was an exemplary household. While my mother, snugly concealed in a large bush, was patiently hatching her precious eggs, three times a year, my father, still very neat and very petulant in spite of his advanced age, foraged here and there all day long and brought beautiful insects, which he held daintily by the end of the tail so as to entice the appetite of his wife; and at eventide, when the weather was fine, he never failed to regale her with a flood of song that rejoiced all who were so fortunate as to hear its melodious cadences. Not a quarrel, nor the slightest misunderstanding, ever disturbed their peace.

Hardly had I entered the world, when my


"Who are you?"

THE WHITE BLACKBIRD

I

How glorious, and yet ofttimes how painful, it is to be an exception! I am not a bird of incredible origin; on the contrary, Monsieur de Buffon has described and classified me. But alas! I am extremely rare and difficult to find. Would to Heaven I were unknown!

My father and mother were good honest people, who lived for a number of years in an old garden near Marais. Theirs was an exemplary household. While my mother, snugly concealed in a large bush, was patiently hatching her precious eggs, three times a year, my father, still very neat and very petulant in spite of his advanced age, foraged here and there all day long and brought beautiful insects, which he held daintily by the end of the tail so as to entice the appetite of his wife; and at eventide, when the weather was fine, he never failed to regale her with a flood of song that rejoiced all who were so fortunate as to hear its melodious cadences. Not a quarrel, nor the slightest misunderstanding, ever disturbed their peace.

Hardly had I entered the world, when my

father, for the first time in his life, gave evidence of ill-humor. While, in early youth, I was only a doubtful gray, he contended that I possessed neither the color nor the general characteristics of his numerous offspring.

"What a dirty child!" he said, looking at me askance; "that fellow looks as though he had been playing in all the plaster beds and mud-holes he could find to get so ugly and muddy."

"But, my dear," replied my mother, rolled up like a ball in an old porringer which served as her nest, "that is what you should expect at his age. I warrant you, yourself, were something of a scapegrace in your youth. Just give our little birdie time to grow, and you will see how beautiful he will become; he is the best of all my children."

Although my mother always took my part, she was not blind to the true state of affairs; she knew that all was not right, but she was my mother, and a mother's heart goes out in sympathy to that child who has been wronged by nature, as if the fault were hers, and she would ward off the stroke aimed at her offspring by cruel fate.

When the time for my first moulting came, my father watched me with pensive interest. While my feathers were falling, he treated me kindly, even offering me some food when he saw me shivering in naked helplessness in the corner;

but when my poor benumbed pinions became covered with down, and one white feather after another began to appear, he fell into such a rage that I feared he would pluck out all my feathers at once. Alas! I had no mirror; I did not know the cause of that fury, and I asked myself why the best of fathers should be so cruel.

One day, when the bright sunlight was falling on my budding plumage, I felt in my heart such a deep sense of joy that, in spite of myself, I burst into song. At the first note, my father leaped into the air like a sky-rocket.

"What is that I hear?" he cried; "is it thus a blackbird sings? Is that the way I sing? Do you call that singing?"

And, alighting by my mother, with a frightful expresson of wrath on his face, he shrieked:

"Wretch! what is this you have hatched in my nest?"

At these words my indignant mother raised herself in her nest and tried to speak, but her sobs stifled all utterance; she fell to the ground in a fainting condition. I feared she was dying. Trembling with fear, I threw myself at my father's feet.

"Oh, my father!" I cried, "if my song displeases you, if I am not dressed to your taste, let not my mother suffer for it! Is it her fault if nature has refused me such a voice as yours? Is it her fault if I have not your beautiful yel-

low beak and your fine black coat *à la Français,* which makes you look like a churchwarden swallowing an omelet? If Heaven has made me a monster, and if some one must bear the blame, grant that I may be the only victim of your wrath!"

"That has nothing to do with it," said my father; "what has that to do with the absurd manner in which you have just attempted to sing? Who taught you to sing thus in defiance of all custom and rules?"

"Alas! sir," I very humbly replied, "I sung as best I could, feeling somewhat merry because the weather was fine; perhaps, because I had eaten too many flies."

"Such singing as that is not permitted in my family," replied my father, infuriated with rage. "For centuries we have been taught, from father to son, to sing, and you should know that, when I make my voice heard in the night, there is an old fellow on the first floor and a young grisette in the attic who open their windows to listen. Is it not enough that I should have before my eyes the frightful color of your dirty plumage, which makes you look like a clown at a fair? If I were not the most pacific of blackbirds I would long ago have plucked you as bare as a dressed chicken."

"Very well," I replied, shocked at my father's injustice, "if that is the way matters stand, sir,

I shall at once relieve you of my hated presence. I shall go away; I shall flee from your sight; other children will cheer your last days, since my mother increases your family three times a year. I shall go far away and hide my misery, and perchance," I continued, sobbing, "I shall find, in some neighboring gutter, some worms or spiders on which to sustain my miserable life."

"As you please," replied my father, far from being moved by my words. "Let me never see you again! You are not my son; you are not a blackbird."

"And what am I then, if you please?"

"I am sure I do not know, but you are not a blackbird."

With these crushing words my father turned away. My mother sadly raised her head, and I could see that her eyes were filled with tears. As for me, confused and disheartened, I directed my flight as best I could toward the gutter on the roof of a neighboring house.

II

My father was so cruel as to leave me several days in that mortifying situation. Despite occasional outbursts of passion, he had a good heart, and, by the side glances he cast toward

me, I could see that he was ready to pardon me and welcome me under the paternal bush. My mother continually raised her pitying eyes to my lofty perch, and even dared to call to me with a plaintive little cry; but I could see that my horrible white plumage inspired them with feelings of repugnance and even fright for which there was no remedy.

"I am not a blackbird!" I repeated one morning, and, stepping to the edge of the gutter, I examined my image reflected in the water, and for the first time realized the fact that I differed from all the rest of my family. "O Heaven!" I cried, "tell me what I am!"

One very wet night, when I was going to sleep, exhausted with hunger and sorrow, there alighted near me a bird more drenched with rain and more attenuated with hunger and fatigue than I. He was about my color, as far as I could judge by looking at him through the blinding rain, and he had on his body hardly enough plumage to feather a sparrow, although he was larger than I. At the first glance he appeared to be in most destitute circumstances, but, in spite of the storm which beat about his head, he maintained so proud a bearing that I was charmed with him. I modestly saluted him with a most respectful bow, to which he replied by a stroke of his beak which almost felled me to the ground. Seeing me scratch my ear and remove

to a more respectful distance without making any attempt to reply to him in his own language, he addressed me in a voice as harsh as his head was bald:

"Who are you?"

"Alas! sir," I replied, fearing a second blow, "I do not know. I thought I was a blackbird, but I am convinced that I am not."

The singular nature of my reply, together with my air of sincerity, interested him. He drew closer to me and asked me to tell him the story of my life; which I did, with all the sadness and humility which befitted the nature of that story and the wrath of the warring elements.

"If you were a carrier-pigeon like me," said he after listening to my story, "such trifles would not cause you a moment's uneasiness. We travel much; that is our life; we have our love adventures, but we do not know who are our fathers. To cleave the air, to traverse space, to see at our feet mountains and plains, to breathe the azure of heaven itself, and not the exhalations of earth, to move like a flash toward a point which never escapes us, such is our pleasure, such is our life. I go farther in one day than a man can in ten."

"Upon my honor, sir," I replied, becoming more bold, "you are something of a Bohemian."

"I care nothing for that," he replied. "I have no country; I know but three things: trav-

els, my wife, and my little ones. Where my wife is, there is my country."

"But what have you there hung about your neck? It appears to be a crumpled piece of paper."

"Important papers," replied he, his neck swelling with pride; "I am on my way to Brussels, and have certain letters for a celebrated banker, . . . which will lower the price of Government Bonds one franc and seventy-eight centimes."

"Heavens!" I cried, "what a fine life to lead! Brussels must be a very fine city. Can you not take me with you? Since I am not a blackbird I may be a carrier-pigeon."

"If you were a carrier-pigeon," replied he, "you would have resented that blow I dealt you a little while ago."

"Very well, sir, I will resent it, but let us not quarrel about such a small thing as that. The day is dawning rapidly and the storm is subsiding. Kindly permit me to follow you. I am in despair; I have not much to hope for here. If you refuse me, I have nothing to do but drown myself in this gutter."

"Very well, let us be off! Follow me, if you can."

I cast a parting glance toward the garden where my mother was sleeping. A tear trickled down my cheek; the wind and the rain carried

it away. I spread my wings and launched forth on my journey.

III

My wings, as I have said, were not yet strong. While my guide flew like the wind, I labored along at his side. I held my own for some time, but I soon became so dizzy that I feared I was about to faint.

"Have we much farther to go?" I asked in a feeble voice.

"No, we are now at Bourget; we have only sixty leagues more to make."

I endeavored to keep up my courage and prove myself something better than a weakling; but at the end of another quarter of an hour I was completely exhausted.

"Sir," I stammered, "could you not stop just a moment? I am distressed with a terrible thirst, and a few minutes' rest on a tree . . ."

"Go to the deuce! You are nothing but a blackbird!" replied the carrier-pigeon in disgust, and, without deigning to turn his head, he sped along in his mad flight. As for me, almost fainting with fatigue, I fluttered helplessly into a field of grain.

I do not know how long I lay there in a faint condition. When I recovered consciousness, the first thing which occurred to my mind was the cruel taunt hurled at me by the carrier-pigeon:

"You are nothing but a blackbird!" O my dear parents, were you not mistaken? I shall return to you; you will recognize me as your legitimate child, and you will give me my accustomed place in the leaves under my mother's nest.

I made an effort to rise, but the fatigue of my long flight and the shock of my fall paralyzed my limbs. As soon as I had gained my feet, I tottered forward a few feet and then fell over on my side.

The horror of death seized me. I was about to close my eyes and resign myself to my fate, when I saw two charming creatures approaching me on tiptoe. As they advanced through the corn-flowers and poppies, I saw that one of them was a little magpie, very much speckled and decidedly coquettish, and the other a rose-colored turtle-dove. The turtle-dove stopped a few paces from me with a charming expression of modesty and compassion for my misfortune; but the magpie fluttered up to me in the most friendly manner imaginable.

"Poor child! what are you doing here?" she asked in playful tones of silvery sweetness.

"Alas! Madame la Marquise," I replied, for I supposed her title could be nothing less, "I am an unfortunate traveler deserted on the way by a faithless postilion, and I am dying of hunger."

"Merciful Heaven! is it possible?" she cried.

She immediately began to flit about here and there among the bushes which surrounded us, gathering berries and fruit which she heaped up in a little pile before me, questioning me all the while.

"But who are you? Whence do you come? Your adventure seems incredible. And where are you going? Traveling alone, and so young, for I see you have just moulted for the first time! Who are your parents? Where do they live? How did you get into such a predicament? Why, it is enough to make the feathers stand up on one's head!"

While she was talking I had managed to rise up on one side, and was eating the food she had brought me with a zest born of long fasting. The turtle-dove continued to regard me with the same expression of sympathetic interest. From the way I turned my head from side to side she understood that I was thirsty. Of the rain that had fallen during the night there remained a drop on a blade of chickweed; she timidly gathered that drop on the end of her beak and brought it to me. Certainly such reserve would never have melted into such kindly attention if I had not been very sick.

I did not yet know what love was, but my heart began to throb violently. A prey to conflicting emotions, I was rapidly yielding to the spell which her presence seemed to throw over

me. The manner in which I was served was so dainty, my little cup-bearer so sweet, that I would fain have dined thus through all eternity. Unfortunately, everything has its limits, even the appetite of a convalescent. The food disposed of and my strength restored, I satisfied the curiosity of the little magpie, and recounted for her benefit the story of my misfortunes with as much sincerity as I had first confided them to the carrier-pigeon the evening before. The magpie listened with closer attention than I supposed her capable of, and the turtle-dove gave me many charming proofs of her deep interest. But when I touched on the cause of all my woe, my ignorance of my own identity, the magpie could no longer restrain herself.

"Are you joking?" she cried; "you, a blackbird! you, a pigeon! Fie! you are a magpie, my dear child, and a very fine magpie indeed," she added, giving me a gentle tap with her wing, in lieu of her fan.

"But it seems to me, Madame la Marquise," I replied, "that for a magpie I am of such a color not to offend you . . ."

"A Russian magpie, my dear; you are a Russian magpie! Did you not know that they are white? Poor fellow, how innocent!"

"But, madame," I resumed, "how could I be a Russian magpie, born as I was in Paris in an old porringer near the Marais?"

"Oh, my dear child, you are the offspring of some migratory specimen of our race. Did you not know there were such? Trust yourself to my care, and I will show you the most beautiful things in the world."

"Where, madame, if you please?"

"In my verdant palace, my dear; you shall see the life I lead. You will not have been a magpie more than a quarter of an hour before you will determine to be a magpie forever. We are one hundred in number; not coarse village magpies who ask alms on the highway, but all nobles and merry comrades, small and chipper, no larger than a man's fist. Each one of us has seven black marks and five white marks; there is no exception to this, and we hold the rest of the world in contempt. It is true you have no black marks, but your Russian origin will serve to secure you admittance to our circle. Our life consists in two things, cackling and strutting about. From morning till noon we are busy pluming our feathers, and from noon till night we cackle. Each one of us perches on a tree, the highest and oldest we can find. In the midst of the forest there towers a lofty oak, uninhabited, alas! It was the dwelling-place of the late king Magpie X, whither we go on pilgrimages, heaving doleful sighs; but, aside from this slight solemnity, we pass the time most merrily. Our wives are not prudes, our husbands are not jeal-

ous; our pleasures are pure and simple because our hearts are as noble as our language is free and joyous. Our pride knows no limit, and if a jay or other vulgar bird happens to find his way into our circle we pluck him most pitilessly. But we are, notwithstanding, the best people in the world, and the sparrows, the tomtits, and the goldfinches who live in our neighborhood find us the very best of friends and protectors. Nowhere is there so much cackling as with us, and nowhere so little slander. We are not lacking in pious old magpies, who say their prayers all day long, but the most thoughtless of our younger gossips need never fear a reproving peck from the severest old dowager. In a word, we live for pleasure, honor, gossip, glory, and dress."

"That is all very attractive, madame," I replied, "and I would be lacking in intelligent appreciation if I should fail in respect for such a person as you. But before doing myself the honor of following your advice, kindly permit me to address a word to this amiable creature at your side. Mademoiselle," I continued, addressing myself to the turtle-dove, "answer me frankly, I beg of you: do you think I am really a Russian magpie?"

At that question the turtle-dove bowed her head, and a light blush, the color of Lolotte's ribbons, came to her cheeks.

"Sir, I hardly know how to . . ."

"In Heaven's name, speak! I have no thought of offending you; quite the contrary. You are both so sweet and so charming that I pledge my word I will offer my heart and foot to the one who will accept them the moment I know whether I am a magpie or something else; for, in looking at you," I added, lowering my voice and addressing the dove, "I feel within me a strange sense of affinity which torments me in a singular manner."

"But truly," replied the turtle-dove, reddening still more, "I do not know whether it is the reflection of the sunlight falling on these poppies, or whether it is due to some other cause, but your plumage seems to have a light tint . . ."

She did not dare go on.

"O perplexity!" I cried, "how am I to know what to believe? How can I give my heart to either of you when it is so cruelly tortured? O Socrates! what an admirable precept you expressed for me when you said, 'Know thyself!'"

Since the day my unhappy song had so deeply offended my father I had not used my voice. At that moment it occurred to me to employ it as a means of learning the truth. "*Parbleu!*" I said to myself, "since my father has disinherited me on account of my first couplet, it is certain that the second will produce some effect on these ladies!" Making a polite bow, as

though to bespeak the indulgence of my audience on account of the severe drenching I had received, I began to whistle, then to warble, then to trill, finally to sing with all my might like a Spanish muleteer in full swing.

As I sung, the little magpie began to move away with an air of surprise, which soon gave way to alarm mingled with profound ennui. She began to describe circles around me as a cat around a piece of hot meat which has just burned its tongue, but which it is as yet unwilling to abandon. Seeing the effect of my ruse, and determined to push matters to the bitter end, the more impatient the poor marquise became the louder I sung. She resisted my melodious effusions for twenty-five minutes, and then, unable to endure it longer, she fled screaming with terror toward her verdant palace. As for the turtle-dove, she had fallen sound asleep from the first note.

"Admirable effect of harmony," thought I. "O native Marais! O maternal porringer! My heart goes out to thee!"

At the moment I was turning away, the turtle-dove opened her eyes.

"Adieu," said she, "thou stranger so gentle and so tiresome! My name is Gourouli; remember me!"

"Beautiful Gourouli," I replied, "you are good, sweet, and charming; I would fain live

and die for you. But your color is that of the rose; so much happiness is not for me!"

IV

THE mournful effect my singing had produced saddened me. "Alas! Music; alas! Poesy," I repeated on my way toward Paris, "how few there are who understand you!"

While absorbed in these reflections, I knocked my head against that of a bird flying in the opposite direction. The shock was so sudden, so unexpected, that we both fell on the top of a tree which was fortunately just beneath us. When we had shaken ourselves a few times, I looked at the newcomer, expecting a quarrel. I noted with surprise that he was white. His head was somewhat larger than mine, and on his forehead there rested a kind of plume which gave him a mock-heroic appearance. Moreover, he carried his tail bravely in the air; and yet he did not seem to be inclined to offer battle. We approached each other and began to apologize for the unfortunate shock which had attended our first meeting. I took the liberty to ask his name and nationality.

"I am astonished," said he, "that you do not know me. Are you not one of us?"

"To tell the truth, sir," I replied, "I do not know what I am. Every one asks me and tells

me the same thing. I must be a wager some one has made."

"You are surely joking," he made answer; "your plumage becomes you too well for me to fail to recognize you as a brother. You certainly belong to that illustrious and venerable race known in Latin as *cacuata*, to the savant as *kakatoë*, and in vulgar parlance cockatoo."

"Indeed, sir, it is possible, and the idea flatters my pride. But let us pretend that I am not, and deign to tell me to whom I have the honor of speaking."

"I am," replied the unknown, "the great poet Kacatogan. I have made redoubtable journeys, and I have suffered the hardships of cruel peregrinations. I have been making rhymes for many years, and my muse has seen unhappy days. I have hummed under Louis XVI, twittered for the Republic, nobly sung the praises of the Empire, discreetly praised the Restoration. I have even done something for these latter days, but have submitted, not without sorrow, to the exigencies of this tasteless generation. I have launched into the world piquant distiches, sublime hymns, graceful dithyrambs, pious elegies, hairy dramas, woolly romances, powdered ballads, and baldheaded tragedies. In a word, I can pride myself on having decked the temple of the Muses with some festive garlands, some somber arches, and some ingenious arabesques.

But now, although I am grown old, I still compose verdant rhymes, and I was just thinking over a new poem in one canto which was to have not less than six pages, when you knocked me on the head. If I can do anything for you, I am at your service."

"Indeed, sir, you can do something for me, for I am at this very moment in great poetic embarrassment. I dare not say I am a poet, much less a great poet, such as you," I added with a polite bow, "but nature has endowed me with a throat that longs to be in action when I am feeling good or when I am in trouble. To tell the truth, I am completely ignorant of all rules."

"I have forgotten them," said Kacatogan; "do not worry about that."

"But I am compelled to admit," I resumed, "that my voice produces, on those who hear it, the same effect as that of Jean de Neville on . . . You know what I wish to say?"

"I know," said Kacatogan; "I, too, have noticed that strange effect. The cause is unknown, but the fact is incontestable."

"But, sir, you, who seem to be the Nestor of poetry, do you not know some remedy for it?"

"No," said Kacatogan; "for my part, I have never been able to find any. In my youth I was sorely troubled because of the hisses which greeted my efforts to please, but now I think

nothing of it. I consider that repugnance due to the fact that the public have read other writers than us, and that distracts their attention."

"I agree with you; but, sir, you must confess that it is hard for one whose intentions are good to put people to flight when he would charm them with his voice. Will you kindly listen to me and give me your advice?"

"Very willingly," replied Kacatogan; "I am all attention."

I immediately began to sing, and had the satisfaction of seeing that Kacatogan neither tried to escape nor went to sleep. He regarded me fixedly, and from time to time nodded his head with approbation, giving vent to a kind of murmur of approval. But I soon perceived that he was not listening to me, and that he was thinking of his poem. Profiting by a moment's pause, in which I was taking breath, he interrupted me.

"I have found it—I have found that rhyme," said he, smiling, and shaking his head; "it is the sixty thousand seven hundred and fourteenth which has come from this head of mine. And yet they dare to say that I am growing old! I am going to read that to my good friends; I am going to read it to them, and we shall see what they will say."

Speaking thus, he took flight and disappeared, apparently forgetting that he had ever met me.

V

ALONE and disappointed, I had nothing better to do than to resume my flight toward Paris. Unfortunately, I did not know my way. My journey with the carrier-pigeon had been too swift to admit of careful examination of the route. So, instead of turning to the right, I turned to the left at Bourget, and, night approaching rapidly, I was compelled to seek shelter in the forest of Morfontaine.

It was the hour of sleep when I arrived. The magpies and jays, who, as every one knows, are the lightest sleepers in the world, were wrangling and bickering on all sides. In the bushes the sparrows were twittering angrily and hopping about one over the other. In the water, near the edge of the stream, gravely stalked two herons, perched on their long legs in the attitude of meditation. Enormous ravens, the George Dandins of the place, half asleep, flew lazily above the tops of the loftiest trees, crooning their evening prayers. Lower down, the amorous tomtits were twittering busily in the copse, while a belated woodpecker pushed his entire household out the back door in his frantic efforts to enter his home in a hollow tree. Flocks of sparrows were constantly arriving from the fields, dancing through the air like puffs of smoke and

settling down on some bushes which they completely covered; finches, fauvettes, robin redbreasts, were grouped together on the lower branches like crystals on a girandole. On every side, voices could be heard calling: "Come, wife!" "Come, my daughter!" "Here I am, my dear!" "This way, my love!" "Good evening, sweet mistress!" "Adieu, my friends!" "Sleep well, my little ones!"

What an embarrassing situation for a celibate, obliged to put up in such an inn! I decided to look for some birds who resembled me in form and ask permission to enjoy their hospitality. "In the night-time," thought I, "all birds are gray, and what harm would it do to ask them to grant me the privilege of resting at a respectful distance from them?"

I first directed my steps toward a ditch where some starlings were gathered. They were making their toilet for the night with great care, and I remarked that most of them had gilded wings and polished claws; they were the dandies of the forest. They were pleasant fellows, but they did not honor me with any attention, and their conversation was so vain and empty, they recited with so much fatuity their quarrels and their adventures, their general intercourse was marked by such stupid vapidity, that it was impossible for me to endure their company.

I immediately flew away and perched on a

branch occupied by a half-dozen birds of different varieties. I modestly appropriated the last place at the extremity of the branch, hoping that would suffice for me. Unfortunately, my neighbor was an old dove as dry as a rusty weather-vane. At the time of my arrival, the few feathers which decked her body were the objects of her particular solicitude; she pretended to be pluming herself, but she was too much afraid of losing one of her feathers to indulge in an elaborate toilet; she merely passed them in review to assure herself that they were all there. No sooner had I alighted on the bough beside her, than she drew herself up in the most majestic manner.

"What are you doing here, sir?" said she, pursing up her beak with severe British prudery.

With these words, she dealt me a blow with her wing, which would have done credit to a street-porter, and knocked me from my perch.

I fell into the grass near a hazel grouse. My mother herself, in her domestic porringer, had no sweeter air of maternal benignity. She was so soft and plump, so comfortably seated on her triple stomach, that one would have taken her for a paté of which the crust had been eaten. I stole gently, almost furtively, to her side. "She will not awaken," I said to myself; "and even if she does, such a nice, stout old lady could not be unkind." And she was not. She half

opened her eyes, and said to me, as she heaved a gentle sigh:

"You disturb me, my little one," said she; "please go away."

At the same moment I heard some one calling to me; it was some thrushes up in an ash tree who were motioning me to come to them. "At last I have found some good companions," thought I. They made room for me, smiling the while, like little fools, and I settled myself in this feathery group as snugly as a billet-doux in a sleeve. But I was not long in discovering that these ladies had been eating more grapes than were good for them; they could hardly hold on to the branches on which they were perched, and their questionable jests, their bursts of laughter, and their improper songs compelled me to leave them.

I was beginning to despair, and was searching for some solitary spot in which to sleep, when a nightingale broke into song. Every one listened. Alas! how sweet and pure her voice! How touching her melancholy! Far from troubling the repose of others, her delicious melody seemed rather to rock the cradle of dreams. No one thought of interrupting her song; no one took offense that she should sing at such an hour; her father did not reprove her, her friends did not take flight.

"Then I am the only one to whom happiness

is denied," I muttered. "I shall go away; I shall flee this cruel world. I would better resume my lonely flight at the risk of being swallowed by some owl, than allow myself to be thus tortured by the sight of the happiness of others!"

With that thought uppermost in my mind, I resumed my flight and wandered about for some time without knowing where I was going. By the first gleams of the morning sun I spied the towers of Notre Dame. In the twinkling of an eye I had reached the spot, and had soon sighted the garden in which I was born. I flew toward it like a flash. Alas! it was empty. In vain I called on my parents; no one replied. The tree on which my father was accustomed to perch, the maternal bush, the cherished porringer, all had disappeared. The ax had destroyed the last vestige of the home of my youth; in the place of the green covert in which I was born, there remained only a bundle of fagots.

VI

I BEGAN to search for my parents in the gardens around about, but in vain. They had doubtless sought a new home in some distant quarter, and I could find no trace of them.

A victim to the deepest melancholy, I perched on the gutter to which I had been banished by

my father's wrath. I passed entire days and nights deploring my sad state. I could not sleep, I could hardly eat. I was ready to die from grief.

One day I was thus lamenting my fate:

"So I am not a blackbird, since my father disinherits me; nor a pigeon, since I fell exhausted on the route to Brussels; nor a Russian magpie, since the little marquise closed her ears as soon as I opened my beak; nor a turtle-dove, since Gourouli, the tender Gourouli herself, snored like a monk while I was singing; nor a cockatoo, since Kacatogan would not deign to listen to me; nor any kind of bird whatsoever, since I was obliged to sleep alone at Morfontaine. And yet I have feathers on my body; here are claws, and here are wings. I am not a monster, since Gourouli, and even the little marquise, found me to their taste. Owing to what inexplicable mystery do these feathers, these wings, and these claws refuse to form an ensemble to which a name may be ascribed? May I not perchance be . . ." I was about to continue my doleful reflections, when I was interrupted by a dispute between two porters down in the street.

"Ah, *parbleu!* Will you never cease your senseless twaddle? Do you want me to make you a present of a white blackbird?"

"Heavens!" I cried, "that is what I am! O

Providence! I am the son of a blackbird, and I am white! I am a white blackbird!"

That discovery, I must confess, led me to change my views concerning myself. Instead of continuing my sad lements, I began to swell with pride, and marched proudly up and down the gutter with the air of a conqueror.

"It is something to be even a white blackbird," said I; "white blackbirds are not found everywhere. I did well to moan because I could not find my like among the haunts of birds; that is the lot of genius, and it is mine! Then I wished to flee from the world, now I wish to astonish it! Since I am that rare bird whose existence is denied by the vulgar, I ought to comport myself as becomes my distinguished position, and, like the Phœnix, I should look down upon all other winged creatures. I must buy the memoirs of Alfieri and the poems of Lord Byron; that substantial nourishment will inspire me with noble pride, without counting what God has given me. Yes, I wish to add, if possible, to the prestige of my birth. Nature has made me rare, I will make myself mysterious. It will be esteemed a favor, it will be glory merely to see me. And," I added in a low tone, "what if I should consent to exhibit myself for money?

"Fie! what an unworthy thought! I will write a poem, not like Kacatogan, in one canto,

but in twenty-four, like all great poets; that is not enough—there shall be forty-eight, with notes and an appendix! The universe must be informed that I exist. In my verses I will not fail to deplore my isolation, but in such a manner that the happiest shall envy me. Since Heaven has refused me a mate, I will say all manner of evil of the sex; I will prove that everything is too green except the grapes which I eat. The nightingales must look out for themselves; I will demonstrate that, as two and two make four, their plaintive melodies corrupt the heart and that their songs are worthless. I must call on Charpentier. I wish to win a powerful literary position. I expect to have about me a court composed not only of journalists, but of authors, and even of women of letters. I will create a rôle for Mademoiselle Rachel, and if she refuses to play it, I will have it proclaimed abroad that her talent is inferior to that of some old actresses from the provinces. I will go to Venice, and I will take possession of the beautiful palace of Mocenigo on the banks of the grand canal, in the midst of that fairy city; that palace shall cost me a hundred francs a day; there I will become inspired with all the memories which the author of *Lara* must have left there. From the midst of my solitude I will inundate the world with a flood of miscellaneous rhymes, modeled after the strophe of

Spenser; there I will solace my heart, I will make all the tomtits sigh, all the turtle-doves warble for love, all the woodcocks melt into tears, and all the old owls hoot in derision. But as far as my person is concerned, I will be inexorable and inaccessible to love. In vain shall they urge me, beg me, to have pity on the unfortunates who have been seduced by my sublime music; to all I will reply with scorn and contempt. O excess of glory! my manuscripts will be worth their weight in gold; my books will cross the seas; renown and fortune will follow me everywhere; alone in the crowd which surrounds me, I will remain indifferent to its murmurs. In a word, I will be a perfect white blackbird, a veritable eccentric man of letters, fêted, petted, admired, envied, but an unmitigated and insufferable grumbler."

VII

Only six weeks were required to bring out my first work. It was, as I had determined, a poem in forty-eight cantos. There were some evidences of carelessness in my work, owing to the wealth of ideas with which it was burdened. But I reflected that the public of to-day, accustomed to the fine literature published in the daily papers, would not reproach me on that account.

My success was instantaneous and unequaled. The subject of my work was myself; in that I followed the mode of the time. I recounted the story of my past sufferings with charming fatuity. I placed before the reader a thousand domestic details of the most piquant interest; the description of my mother's porringer required fourteen cantos for adequate treatment. I took account of the furrows, the holes, the dents, the broken places, the splinters, the nails, the spots, the various colors, the reflections; I showed the outside, the inside, the rim, the bottom, the sides, the inclined plane, the general plan; passing to the interior, I studied the blades of grass, the straws, the dry leaves, the little pieces of wood, the gravel, the drops of water, the débris of flies, the remains of cockchafers which were found within. It was a description of absorbing interest. But do not suppose that I put all this together in one spot. If I had done so, there would have been impertinent readers who would have skipped it. I skilfully cut it up into convenient morsels, and scattered these bits through the work in such a way that nothing was lost; so it came to pass that, at the most interesting and dramatic moments, there would occur some fifteen pages of porringer. This arrangement is, I think, one of the great secrets of art; and as I am not avaricious, let him profit by it who will.

All Europe was stirred by the appearance of my book; she devoured the intimate revelations which I had deigned to communicate. How could it have been otherwise? Not only did I enumerate many events in my past life, but I gave to the public a general picture of all the dreams that had passed through this head since the age of two months. I even interpolated, at the most beautiful spot in one of the cantos, an ode composed in my shell. Of course, I did not neglect the great subject which occupies so much of the world's attention—the future of the human family. The problem appeared interesting to me. I sketched, in a moment of leisure, a solution which is generally accepted as satisfactory.

Every day I received compliments in verse, letters of congratulation, and anonymous declarations of love. As for society, I rigorously followed the plan I had outlined; my door was closed to all the world. I could not avoid admitting two foreigners who were announced as relatives of mine. One was a blackbird from Senegal, the other a blackbird from China.

"Oh, sir," said they, embracing me to the point of suffocation, "what a great blackbird you are! How well you have portrayed, in your immortal poem, the profound suffering of unrecognized genius! If we were not already as much misunderstood as possible, we would be-

come more so after having read your work. How we sympathize with your sorrows, with your sublime contempt for all that is vulgar! We, too, know for ourselves the secret sorrows you have sung! Here are two sonnets we have written, the one suggesting the other, and we beg you will accept them."

"Here is the other," added the Chinese blackbird, "to the music composed by my wife on a passage in your preface. It expresses with marvelous fidelity the intention of the author."

"Sirs," I replied, "as far as I am able to judge, you seem to be endowed with warm hearts and exalted understandings. But pardon me if I ask a question: Whence comes your extreme melancholy?"

"Ah, sir," replied the inhabitant of Senegal, "behold how I am made. My plumage, it is true, is agreeable enough to the sight, and I am adorned with this beautiful green color sometimes seen on ducks, but my beak is too short and my foot is too large; and see the tail with which I am provided! My body is only two-thirds of my total length. Is that not enough to induce melancholy?"

"And I, sir," said the Chinese blackbird, "am still more unfortunate. The tail of my confrère sweeps the ground; but children point their fingers at me because I have none at all."

"Sirs," I replied, "I pity you with all my

heart. It is always embarrassing to have too much or too little of anything. But permit me to tell you that there are at the Jardin des Plantes several specimens which resemble you, and which have been there some time, securely impaled. As the fact that a woman of letters is immoral and shameless does not necessarily fit her to produce a good book, so discontent in a blackbird is not a sure index of genius. I am the only one of my kind, and I bewail the fact; perhaps I do wrong, but it is my right. I am white, my dear sirs; become such as I, and we will see what you have to say."

VIII

In spite of the resolution I had taken and the calm I had affected, I was not happy. My isolation, although glorious, was none the less irksome, and I could not look calmly on the prospect of living all my life a celibate. The return of spring, in particular, caused me the most poignant suffering, and I was ready to yield to despair, when an unforeseen circumstance changed my course of life.

It goes without saying that my writings had crossed the Channel and that the English had accorded them an eager welcome. The English welcome everything in this way, except what

they understand. One day I received from London a letter signed by a young lady blackbird.

"I have seen your poem," it read, "and the admiration I have conceived for the author has led me to decide to offer you my hand and fortune. God has created us for each other! I am your equal, for I am a white blackbird."

One may easily imagine my surprise and joy. A white blackbird! Is it possible? I am not, then, the only one on earth! I hastened to reply to the fair unknown, and I did so in a manner which gave evidence of the pleasure with which I entertained her proffer. I urged her to come at once to Paris, or permit me to fly to her. She replied that she preferred to come to to me, as her parents might object to the union; that she would put her affairs in order, and that I should soon see her.

She arrived, in fact, some days later. O joy! she was the most beautiful blackbird in the world, and even whiter than I.

"Ah, mademoiselle," I cried, "or rather madame, for I look upon you as my legitimate wife from this moment, is it possible that such a charming creature as you can have lived on this earth and her existence have been unknown to me? Blessed be the sorrow I have known, the cruelty I have suffered, since Heaven has reserved for me a solace so sweet! Up to this day

I believed that I was condemned to eternal solitude, and, to be frank with you, it was a heavy burden to bear; but I feel within me, as I look upon you, all the qualities of a father of a family. Accept my hand without delay. Let us marry without ceremony, after the English custom, and let us set out for Switzerland."

"I prefer," replied my betrothed, "that our wedding should be magnificent, and that all the blackbirds in France who are of good birth should be solemnly assembled for the occasion. People such as we owe it to our glory not to wed like cats in the gutter. I have brought with me a supply of bank-notes. Make out your invitations, order whatever may be necessary, and do not spare the refreshments."

I yielded blind obedience to her wishes. Our nuptials were celebrated with imposing magnificence; a thousand flies were consumed at the wedding feast. We received the nuptial blessing of the reverend father, Cormoran, who was archbishop *in partibus*. A superb ball followed. My happiness was complete.

The more familiar I became with the character of my charming wife the more my love increased. She combined in her little self all the attractive qualities of body and soul. It is true she was a little prudish, but I attributed that to the influence of the English fog in which she had lived up to that time, and I did not doubt

but that the climate of France would soon dissipate that slight cloud.

A thing that troubled me more seriously was the air of mystery with which she locked herself in her room with her maids, passing thus entire hours at her toilet, as she pretended. Husbands do not like such whims in their household. I would knock at my wife's door twenty times before I could gain admission. That made me very impatient. One day I insisted on her opening the door with so much feeling that she consented with more promptness than usual, not without complaining of my importunity. As I entered, I observed on the table a large bottle of white paste made of Spanish flour. I asked my wife what she was doing with that preparation. She replied that she used it to relieve the pain she suffered from chilblains.

That explanation was not altogether satisfactory; but how could I bring myself to suspect so sweet and so intelligent a creature, who had given herself to me with such sincerity and in such good faith? I did not know that my wife was herself literary until she confessed it, and showed me a manuscript in which she had imitated both Walter Scott and Scarron. You may readily imagine the pleasure such a proof of my wife's versatility gave me. Not only was I the possessor of an incomparable beauty, but I also learned that my companion's intelligence

was in every respect worthy of my genius. From that moment we worked together. While I was writing my poems, she was scribbling away on large sheets of paper. I recited my verses aloud, but that did not interfere with her work. She wrote romances with as much facility as I myself could boast, choosing the most dramatic subjects, parricides, rapes, murders, even petty larceny, always taking care to attack the government and to preach the doctrine of universal freedom for all blackbirds. In a word, no effort seemed to tax her mind, no achievement exhausted her marvelous fecundity; she never erased a single line or made any plan before setting to work. She was the type of the lettered blackbird.

One day, while she was working with unusual ardor, I observed that she was shedding great drops of perspiration, and at the same time I was astonished to behold a large black spot on her back.

"My dear, what is this?" I inquired. "Are you ill?"

At first she appeared a little frightened, almost sheepish; but her knowledge of life and her experience in society enabled her promptly to resume control of herself. She told me that it was a spot of ink which always appeared there in moments of inspiration.

"Is it possible that my wife is fading, that

she is losing her color?" I asked myself in a low voice. That thought troubled my sleep. The bottle of white paste suddenly presented itself to my fevered imagination. "O Heaven," I cried, "what a suspicion! Is it possible that this divine creature is nothing but a painter, a colorist? Has she tricked herself up in this way to deceive me? When I thought I was pressing to my heart the sister of my soul, the privileged being created especially for me, have I married nothing but a sack of flour?"

Tormented by this horrible suspicion, I formed a plan that would either confirm of dispel it. I bought a barometer and waited eagerly for a rainy day. I wished to take my wife to the country some stormy day and try the effect of washing on her color. But it was the middle of July, and the weather was disgustingly fine. The appearance of happiness and the habit of writing had excited my sensibilities to the point of acuteness. I was so constituted that in my work the sentiment was stronger than the idea, and I often fell to weeping while waiting for a rhyme. My wife always enjoyed these exhibitions of weakness on my part; masculine frailty always delights feminine pride. One night, as I was filing an erasure, according to the precept of Boileau, it happened that my heart overflowed.

"O thou!" I began, addressing my cherished companion, "thou only object of my love!

Thou, without whom life would be but an empty dream, thou whose smile changed for me the face of the universe, life of my heart, dost thou know how I love thee? To put into verse some hackneyed idea already used by some other poet would be an easy matter; but how shall I express the lofty sentiments with which thy beauty inspires me? Even the recollection of my past sorrows furnishes me with no word with which to describe my present joy. Before thou camest to me, my isolation was that of an exiled orphan; to-day it is that of a king. In this feeble body which I inhabit until the hand of death shall bid me hence, in this little brain where ferment futile thoughts, canst thou understand, my dear, canst thou realize, my beautiful one, that there is nothing which does not belong to thee? Listen to what my brain can say, and learn that my love is greater, thou glorious! Oh, that my genius were a pearl and thou wert Cleopatra!"

Raving thus, I shed tears on my wife and she lost color rapidly. At each tear I shed there appeared a feather, not exactly black, but rather a dull red. I know not what other colors she had used. After several minutes of tenderness I had before me a bird altogether discolored and defloured, identically the same as the every-day blackbirds of the fields.

What could I do? What could I say? Reproaches seemed vain. It is true I might have

construed her conduct as a forfeiture of all her claims and thus have the marriage set aside; but how could I thus publish my shame? Was not my cup of bitterness already full? I took my courage in both claws; I resolved to quit the world, to abandon my career, to flee to the desert, to avoid, if possible, the society of every living creature, and, like Alceste, to seek

Some lonely spot,
Where even white blackbirds may cast their lot.

IX

I SET out with streaming eyes, and the wind, which is the chance of birds, wafted me to Morfontaine. This time all were asleep. "What a marriage!" I mused. "What deception! And yet it is certain that poor creature tricked herself out in that way with the very best intentions; but I am none the less grieved and she none the whiter."

The nightingale was still singing. Alone in the night, he exulted over that divine possession which rendered him superior to all poets, and gave freely of his thought to the silence which surrounded him.

"How happy you are!" said I to him. "Not only do you sing as much as you choose, and very well, but all the world listens. You have a wife and children, your nest, your friends, a

soft pillow of moss, the full moon by night and no days. Rubini and Rossini are not to be compared with you; you surpass both. I, too, have sung, and it was pitiful. I have ranged words in line like Prussian soldiers, and I have composed silly trifles while you were singing in the woods. What is your secret? Can it be learned by others?"

"Yes," replied the nightingale, "but it is not what you suppose it to be. My wife is a tiresome creature, and I am in love with the rose; Sadi the Persian has spoken of it. I warble all night for her, but she sleeps, and does not hear me. Her chalice is closed at this very moment, and within it there is an old beetle; and to-morrow morning, when I shall seek my couch for repose, exhausted with suffering and fatigue, then will she open her petals and a bee will eat out her heart!"

THE GRISETTE

CHAPTER I

Among the students who last year followed the course of the School of Medicine was a young man named Eugène Aubert. He was of good family, and about nineteen years of age. His parents lived in the country, and made him an allowance, modest but sufficient. He led a quiet life, and was said to have a very gentle disposition. His comrades liked him; under all conditions they found him good and inclined to render services, open-handed and frank of heart. The only fault he was blamed for was a peculiar propensity for dreaming and solitude, and a reserve so excessive in his language and his smallest actions that he had been surnamed "little girl," a surname, moreover, which he laughed at himself, and to which his friends attached no offensive thought, knowing him to be as brave as any other in case of need.

But it is true that his conduct somewhat justified this nickname, especially in the way it contrasted with the habits of his companions. As long as it was only a question of work, he was

The Grisette.

THE GRISETTE

CHAPTER I

Among the students who last year followed the course of the School of Medicine was a young man named Eugène Aubert. He was of good family, and about nineteen years of age. His parents lived in the country, and made him an allowance, modest but sufficient. He led a quiet life, and was said to have a very gentle disposition. His comrades liked him; under all conditions they found him good and inclined to render services, open-handed and frank of heart. The only fault he was blamed for was a peculiar propensity for dreaming and solitude, and a reserve so excessive in his language and his smallest actions that he had been surnamed "little girl," a surname, moreover, which he laughed at himself, and to which his friends attached no offensive thought, knowing him to be as brave as any other in case of need.

But it is true that his conduct somewhat justified this nickname, especially in the way it contrasted with the habits of his companions. As long as it was only a question of work, he was

the first to take up his task; but if it was a question of a pleasure party, a dinner at the Moulin de Beurre, or a dance at La Chaumière, the "little girl" shook his head and went home to his room—an almost monstrous thing among the students. Not only Eugène had no mistress, although his age and figure could have made success sure, but they had never seen him act the gallant at the counter of a grisette, an immemorial custom in the Latin quarter. The beauties who inhabit the Mont Sainte Genevieve and divide among themselves the students' loves, inspired in him a kind of repugnance which almost amounted to aversion. He looked upon them as a different species, dangerous, ungrateful, and depraved, born to leave behind them everywhere evil and unhappiness in exchange for a few pleasures. "Keep away from these women," he would say; "they are red-hot dolls." And unfortunately he found only too many instances to justify the hatred that they inspired in him. Quarrels, disorder, sometimes even the ruin that follows these passing liaisons, of which the exterior resembles happiness, were but too easy to cite, last year like to-day, and probably like next year.

Needless to say, Eugène's friends continually laughed at his words and scruples. "What do you pretend?" one of his friends, named Marcel, who professed to be a jolly companion, often

asked him. "What is proved by a fault, or an accident that may chance to happen once?"

"That we should abstain from it," answered Eugène, "for fear of its occurring a second time."

"False reasoning," answered Marcel; "the argument of a cardboard Capuchin, which falls if its companion trembles. What is there to worry about? One of us loves cards; is it a reason for becoming a monk? One has not a sou, the other drinks fresh water; does Élise lose her appetite in consequence? Whose is the fault if the neighbor takes his watch to the *Mont-de-piété* * to go and break an arm at Montmorency? The lady is not maimed. You fight for Rosalie, and receive a sword-thrust. She turns her back on you; that is very simple; is her figure any the worse? There are small inconveniences with which the path of life is strewn, and they are rarer than you think. You may see on a Sunday, when it is fine, the numerous couples of friends in the cafés, the promenades, and the public houses! Consider those large omnibuses crammed with grisettes, going to Ranelagh or to Belleville. Count those that leave the Saint Jacques quarter on one single holiday alone: the battalions of dressmakers, the armies of laundresses, the clouds of tobacco-sellers. All this crowd amuses itself; they all have their love af-

* A loan bank in France.

fairs, and all go and alight around Paris, beneath the country arbors, like flocks of sparrows. If it rains, they go to the drama and eat oranges and cry; for they eat a great deal, it is true, and cry also at will; that is what proves a good character. But what harm do these little girls do, who have sewn, basted, hemmed, quilted, and mended all the week, in preaching, on a Sunday, the example of the forgetfulness of evil and the love of one's neighbors? And what better can an honest man do, who on his side has just spent a week in attending to things in no way agreeable, than to clear his vision by the sight of a fresh face, a well-rounded leg, and beautiful nature?"

"Whited sepulchers!" said Eugène.

"I tell you, and I maintain," continued Marcel, "that one should praise the grisettes, and that a moderate use of them is good. First, they are virtuous, for they spend the day in making up garments, the most indispensable to decency and modesty; secondly, they are honest, for there is not a laundry owner or any other that does not emphasize to her shop-girls the necessity for speaking politely; thirdly, they are very neat and clean, considering they are incessantly handling linen and cloth which they must not soil under penalty of receiving smaller wages; fourthly, they are sincere, because they drink ratafia; fifthly, they are economical and frugal, because

they have much trouble in making thirty sous, and if there are occasions when they show themselves to be greedy and extravagant, it is never with their own money; sixthly, they are very gay, because the work they do is generally wearisome to death, and they wiggle like a fish in the water as soon as the day's work is over. Another advantage you meet with is that they are in no way troublesome, seeing that they spend their life nailed to a chair from which they can not move, and that in consequence it is impossible for them to run after their lovers like women of higher society. Besides, they do not chatter, because they are obliged to count their stitches. They do not spend much on their shoes, because they walk but little, nor on their toilet, because it is rare that they are given opportunity to do so. If accused of inconstancy, it is not because they read foolish novels, nor out of natural unkindness; it follows from the great number of people who pass before their stores. On the other hand, they sufficiently prove that they are capable of true passions, by the great number of them who daily throw themselves into the Seine, or out of a window, or else asphyxiate themselves in their rooms. They have, it is true, the inconvenience of almost always being hungry or thirsty, precisely on account of their great sobriety; but it is notorious that they can content themselves, in place of a meal, with a glass of

beer and a cigar, a precious quality rarely come across in any household. Briefly, I maintain that they are good, amiable, faithful, and disinterested, and that it is a regrettable occurrence when they finish up in the hospital."

When Marcel spoke thus, it was mostly at a café, when his head was somewhat heated. He would then fill his friend's glass and wish him to drink to the health of Mademoiselle Pinson, a seamstress who was their neighbor. But Eugène would take his hat, and while Marcel continued to hold forth to his comrades, he quietly slipped away.

CHAPTER II

Mademoiselle Pinson was not exactly what one would call a pretty woman. There is a great difference between a pretty woman and a pretty grisette. If a pretty woman, recognized as such, and thus named in Parisian language, took it into her head to put on a small bonnet, a gingham dress, and a silk apron, she would be considered, it is true, a pretty grisette. But if a grisette dresses up in a hat, a velvet jacket, and a silken gown, she is in no way obliged to be a pretty woman; very much the contrary. It is probable that she would have the appearance of a cloak-bearer; and, in having it, she would be within her rights. The difference consists, then, in the

conditions in which these two beings live, and principally in that piece of curved card covered with material and called a hat, that women have judged proper to wear on each side of their heads, something like the flaps of a horse. But one must notice that eye-flaps prevent a horse from looking from side to side, and that the piece of card prevents nothing at all.

However it may be, a little bonnet authorizes a turned-up nose, which in its turn wants a well-opened mouth, which again needs beautiful teeth, and a round face as a frame. A round face demands brilliant eyes; it is best that they be as black as possible, and appropriate brows; hair *ad libitum*, granted that the black eyes undertake everything. Such a whole, as one may see, is far from beauty, truly speaking. It is known as an irregular face, the classic figure of a grisette, which would perhaps be ugly beneath that piece of a card, but which the bonnet at times renders charming, and prettier than beauty. Such was Mademoiselle Pinson.

Marcel had got it into his head that Eugène ought to lay siege to this young lady; why, I do not know, unless it was that he was himself the adorer of Mademoiselle Zelia, an intimate friend of Mademoiselle Pinson. It seemed to him natural and convenient to arrange things to suit his taste in this way, and to make love amicably. Similar calculations are not rare, and

succeed often enough, occasion, since the beginning of the world, being of all temptations the strongest. Who can say what has given birth to happy or unhappy events, to lovers' quarrels, joys, or despairs, to two neighbors, a secret staircase, a corridor, a broken window-pane?

Certain characters, nevertheless, refuse to give way to these games of chance. They wish to conquer their pleasures, not to gain them in a lottery, and do not feel disposed to love because they find themselves in a coach beside a pretty woman. Such was Eugène, and Marcel was aware of it; and he had for some time formed a project, simple enough, which he believed to be marvelous and especially infallible, to conquer the resistance of his companion.

He had resolved to give a supper, and found nothing better than to seize upon his birthday as a pretext. So he had ten dozen bottles of beer brought to his room, a large piece of cold veal with salad, an enormous roll, and a bottle of champagne. He invited first of all two friends, students; then he informed Mademoiselle Zelia that he was going to entertain that night, and asked her to bring Mademoiselle Pinson with her. They were careful not to be absent. Marcel passed, and justly so, as one of the *tolous rouges* of the Latin quarter, of those who are not refused; and seven in the evening had hardly struck when the two grisettes knocked

at the student's door, Mademoiselle Zelia in a short dress, gray boots, and a hat trimmed with flowers; Mademoiselle Pinson, more modest, in a black dress which never left her, and which gave her, so it was said, a kind of Spanish look of which she showed herself very jealous. Both ignored, as one may well imagine, the secret designs of their host.

Marcel had not been clumsy enough to invite Eugène in advance; he would have been too sure of a refusal on his part. It was only when these young ladies had taken their places at table, and after the first glass had been emptied, that he asked permission to absent himself for a few moments to go and invite a guest, and directed himself toward the house Eugène lived in. He found him, as usual, working alone, surrounded by his books. After a few commonplace remarks, he commenced gently to make his accustomed reproaches—that he would tire himself out, that he was wrong to have no distraction, and then proposed a short walk. Eugène, somewhat lazy, in fact, having studied all day, accepted. The two young men went out together, and it was not difficult for Marcel, after a turn or two in the Luxembourg, to oblige his friend to go to his room with him.

The two grisettes, alone, and annoyed at waiting, had begun by making themselves comfortable; they had removed their shawls and their

bonnets and were dancing and singing, not without, from time to time, doing honor to the provisions, as a trial. Their eyes already brilliant and their faces animated, they stopped, happy and somewhat out of breath, when Eugène greeted them with an air at the same time timid and surprised. In consequence of his solitary habits, they scarcely knew him; and they had soon examined him from head to foot with that intrepid curiosity which is the privilege of their class; then they went back to their song and their dance as if nothing had happened. The newcomer, half disconcerted, was already taking one or two steps backward, thinking perhaps of retreat, when Marcel, having doubly locked the door, with a great clatter threw the key on the table.

"Still no one!" cried he. "What, then, are our friends doing? But never mind; the savage belongs to us. Mademoiselles, I present to you the most virtuous young man in France and in Navarre, who has for long desired the honor of your acquaintance, and who is particularly a great admirer of Mademoiselle Pinson."

The dance stopped once more. Mademoiselle Pinson lightly bowed and put on her hat.

"Eugène," cried Marcel, "to-day is my birthday; these two ladies have been kind enough to come and celebrate it with us. I almost brought you here by force, it is true; but I hope you

will willingly stay, and that is our united prayer. It is now about eight o'clock; we have time to smoke a pipe before we are ready to eat."

Speaking thus, he glanced significantly at Mademoiselle Pinson, who, understanding immediately, smilingly bowed a second time, and said to Eugène in a gentle voice, " Yes, monsieur, we beg you to stay."

At this moment the two students whom Marcel had invited knocked at the door. Eugène now saw that there was no means of withdrawing without bad grace, and, resigning himself to the inevitable, took his place with the others.

CHAPTER III

The supper was long and noisy. The gentlemen having commenced by filling the room with a cloud of smoke, drank also to refresh themselves. The ladies did most of the talking, and amused the company with more or less piquant stories at the expense of their friends and acquaintances, and moreover described less credible adventures, drawn presumably from life. The material lacked probability, but at least it was not barren. Two lawyers' clerks, if one is to believe them, had made twenty thousand francs out of Spanish stocks, and had eaten them up in six weeks with two girls from a glove store. The son of one of the richest bankers in

Paris had offered to a celebrated laundress a box at the opera and a country house, which she had refused, liking better to look after her parents and remain faithful to a clerk from the Deux-Magots. A certain person, whom they could not name, and who was forced by his rank to envelop himself in the deepest mystery, visited *incognito* an embroiderer in the Pont-Neuf passage, who had suddenly been removed by superior orders, placed in a post-chaise at midnight, with a purse full of bank notes, and sent to the United States, etc.

"Enough," said Marcel; "we know all that. Zelia improvises, and as for Mademoiselle Mimi [so was Mademoiselle Pinson named when they were together], her stories are perfect. Your lawyers' clerks only gained a sprain in jumping streams; your banker offered an orange, and your embroiderer is so little in the United States that she is visible every day, from twelve till four, at the Hospital of La Charité, where she has taken a room in consequence of a lack of victuals."

Eugène was seated near Mademoiselle Pinson. He thought he noticed, at this last word, pronounced with an absolute indifference, that she grew pale. But almost immediately she rose, lit a cigarette, and cried in a deliberate air:

"In your turn, silence! I demand right of speech. Since the Sieur Marcel does not believe

in fables, I will tell you a true story, *et quorum pars magna fui.*"

"You speak Latin?" said Eugène.

"As you see," answered Mademoiselle Pinson. "That sentence comes from my uncle, who served under the great Napoleon, and who never failed to say it before telling the story of a battle. If you do not know what these words mean, you may learn it without payment. It means: 'I give you my word.' You must know, then, that last week I went with two of my friends, Blanchette and Rougette to the Odeon Theater."

"Wait until I cut the cake," said Marcel.

"As I was saying, cut away, but listen," resumed Mademoiselle Pinson. "I went with Blanchette and Rougette to the Odeon, to see a tragedy. Rougette, as you know, has just lost her grandmother; she inherited four hundred francs. We took a corner box. There were three students in the pit; these young men caught sight of us, and, under the pretext that we were alone, invited us to take supper with them."

"Point blank?" asked Marcel. "Truly it was very gallant. And you refused, I suppose?"

"No, monsieur," said Mademoiselle Pinson, "we accepted, and at the interval, without waiting for the end of the piece, we transported ourselves to Viot's."

"With your cavaliers?"

"With our cavaliers. The waiter began, of

course, by telling us that there was nothing left; but such an inconvenience was not made to stop us. We ordered them to go out and get what might be lacking. Rougette took the pen and commanded a bridal feast: prawns, a sugar omelette, fritters, mussels, eggs *a la neige*, all there is in the world of saucepans. Our young unknowns, to tell the truth, made rather a face."

"So I should think," said Marcel.

"We took no notice. The thing having come to pass, we commenced to act the pretty woman. We found nothing good; everything disgusted us. Hardly was a dish begun when we sent it back and asked for another. 'Waiter, take this away; it is not tolerable. Where did you get such horrible things from?' Our unknowns desired to eat, but they were not allowed to. To be brief, we supped as Sancho dined, and anger drove us even to break some of the crockery."

"Fine conduct! And how to pay for it all?"

"That is just the question the three unknowns addressed each other. From the conversation they had in lowered voices, one of them appeared to possess six francs, the other infinitely less, and the third had nothing but his watch, which he generously took out of his pocket. In this state the three unfortunates presented themselves at the desk, with the idea of gaining some delay. What do you think they were told?"

"I think," answered Marcel, "that you were kept as a pledge, and they were conducted to the round-house."

"That is an error," said Mademoiselle Pinson. "Before entering the room, Rougette had calculated everything, and all was paid for in advance. Imagine their astonishment at this answer of Viot's: 'Gentlemen, all is paid for.' Our unknowns looked at us as three dogs never looked at three bishops, with a pitiful stupefaction, mingled with pure tenderness. We, however, without pretending to take any notice, went down and called a carriage.

"'Dear marquise,' said Rougette to me, 'we must take these gentlemen home.'

"'Willingly, dear comtesse,' I answered. Our poor lovers did not know what to say. And weren't they penitent! They declined our politeness, and did not wish to be taken home; they refused to give their address. I should think so! They were convinced that they were with noble ladies, and they lived in the Rue du Chat qui Peche!"

The two students, friends of Marcel, who up to now had hardly done anything but smoke and drink in silence, seemed little pleased with this story. Their faces became solemn; perhaps they knew as much as Mademoiselle Pinson about this unlucky supper, for they glanced uneasily at her, when Marcel laughingly remarked:

"Name the wretches, mademoiselle. Since it only happened last week, there is no inconvenience in that."

"Never, gentlemen," said the grisette. "One may ridicule a man, but harm his career, never!"

"You are right," said Eugène, "and in this you are acting more wisely than you perhaps think. Of all these young fellows in the schools, there is hardly one who has not some secret fault or folly; and yet from here spring every day the most distinguished and respectable of France—doctors, magistrates, etc."

"Yes," resumed Marcel, "that is true. There are embryo peers of France who dine at Flicoteaux's, and who have not always the wherewithal to pay the bill. But," he added, winking, "have you not seen your unknown again?"

"What do you take us for?" answered Mademoiselle Pinson in a serious and almost offended tone. "Do you know Blanchette and Rougette? And do you suppose that I myself . . ."

"All right," said Marcel, "don't get cross. But, on the whole, what a trick! These scatterbrains perhaps had not the price of their next day's dinner, and yet threw their money away for the pleasure of mystifying three poor devils who could not help themselves!"

"Why did they invite us to supper?" answered Mademoiselle Pinson.

CHAPTER IV

With the cake appeared, in all its glory, the one bottle of champagne that the dessert was to consist of. With the wine they spoke of singing. "I see," said Marcel, "I see, as Cervantes says, Zelia coughing; it is a sign that she wishes to sing. But, if these gentlemen agree, it is I who am being entertained, and who consequently beg Mademoiselle Mimi, if she is not hoarse after her anecdote, to honor us with a song.—Eugène," he continued, "be gallant, and clink glasses with your neighbor, and ask her for a song for me."

Eugène reddened and obeyed. Even as Mademoiselle Pinson had not disdained to persuade him to stay, so he bowed, and said to her timidly: "Yes, mademoiselle, please give us a song."

At the same time he raised his glass and touched the grisette's. From this light impact there resulted a clear and silvery sound. Mademoiselle Pinson seized this note on the wing, and in a pure and fresh voice continued it for a long time in cadence.

"All right," said she; "I consent, since my glass gives me the *la*. But what do you want me to sing you? I am not a haughty prude, I tell you in advance, but I know no barrack-room songs. I do not lower my memory with such things!"

"We know it," said Marcel; "you are virtuous; do as you like; opinions are free."

"Well," resumed Mademoiselle Pinson, "I will sing you some verses of which I am the subject."

"Attention! Who is the author?"

"My comrades in the store. It is poetry made to the movement of the needle; so I entreat your indulgence."

"Is there a chorus to your song?"

"Certainly! What a question!"

"In that case," said Marcel, "let us take our knives when the chorus comes, and strike the table, but let us try and keep time. Zelia can abstain, if she wishes."

"Why so?—you rude boy!" demanded Zelia in anger.

"For a reason," answered Marcel. "But if you wish to join in, here, strike with a cork; it will be less inconvenient for our ears and for your white hands."

Marcel had arranged in rows the glasses and the plates, and sat in the middle of the table, his knife in his hand. The two students of Rougette's supper, somewhat enlivened, removed the mouth-pieces from their pipes so as to hit with the wooden tube; Eugène was dreaming, Zelia pouting. Mademoiselle Pinson took a plate, and made a sign that she wished to break it, to which Marcel made answer by a gesture of

assent, so that the singer, having taken the pieces to make castanets, thus commenced the verses that her companions had composed, after having made excuses in advance for anything in them too flattering to herself.

MIMI PINSON.

Mimi Pinson, she is fair;
Blonde and beautiful is she;
Just one dress, so debonair,
One bonnet, see!
Poorer wardrobe were a shame,
So God wills it, in such fashion
To give Mimi a good name,
For she can not pledge the same,
This dress of Mimi Pinson.
Landerirette!

Mimi Pinson wears a rose
Whiter than her pretty face;
In her heart its leaves disclose
What life and grace!
When a supper gives her cheer,
Then she sings *la chanson*,
Quaffing wine, or only beer,
While there hangs above her ear
Her bonnet, Mimi Pinson.
Landerirette!

Sharpest eyes I do attest,
And with hands concealed by day
In the wide sleeves of her vest,
She stands at bay.
Not maltreating any one,
But giving them a lesson,

Better taught than at Sorbonne—
Do not rumple that chiffon!
That dress of Mimi Pinson.
Landerirette!

A virgin—yes, she may remain so,
If God wills it, to the end,
With her implement to sew
At finger-end;
No fear of earning daily bread,
He must be a fine *garçon*
Who wins her, and be honest bred.
Not very distant from her head,
Her bonnet, Mimi Pinson.
Landerirette!

With a wreath of orange-flower
If to crown her, love sees fit,
She has something, a rare dower,
To give for it.
But do not in haste divine.
Blazoning of escutcheon.
Ah, 'tis something still more fine,
Something neither yours nor mine,
The dress of Mimi Pinson.
Landerirette!

Mimi has no common soul—
Hers a democratic heart;
In the ranks she did enroll,
In war took part.
She had made, in place of blade,
A spear out of a bodkin.
A lovely sentinel she made.
Lucky, who places his cockade
On the *toque* of Mimi Pinson.
Landerirette!

The knives and the pipes, even the chairs, joined in the racket, as had been agreed, at the end of each verse. The glasses danced on the table, and the bottles, half full, merrily balanced themselves, hurtling peacefully against each other's shoulders.

"And it was your good friends," said Marcel, "who wrote that song for you? There is a dyer among them, it is too scented. Give me those good tunes in which things are told!"

And he intoned in a deep voice:

"Nanette was not yet fifteen years old."

"Enough! enough!" said Mademoiselle Pinson; "rather let us dance; let us have a waltz. Is there any musician present?"

"I have what you need," answered Marcel; "I have a guitar; but," he continued, taking down the instrument, "my guitar has not what it needs—it lacks three strings."

"But there is a piano," said Zelia. "Marcel shall play for us."

Marcel threw a glance at his mistress as furious as if she had accused him of a crime. It was true that he knew enough to play a dance; but it was for him, as for many others, a kind of torture to which he submitted with little goodwill. Zelia, in betraying him, was revenging herself for the cork.

"Are you mad?" said Marcel. "You know

very well that this piano is there but for glory, and that only you can thumb it over, God knows! Where did you hear I could play dance music? I only know the *Marseillaise*, which I play with one finger. If you address yourself to Eugène, very good; that's the fellow to understand it. But I do not wish to annoy him to that extent —far from it. You only are indiscreet enough to do such things."

For the third time Eugène blushed, and preferred to do what he was asked in such a politic and indirect manner. So he sat down to the piano, and a quadrille was organized.

It was almost as long as the supper. After the quadrille came a waltz; after the waltz, a galop—for they still galop in the Latin quarter. These ladies especially were indefatigable, and gamboled and laughed enough to awake the whole neighborhood. Soon Eugène, doubtly fatigued by the clamor and his vigil, while still mechanically playing, fell into a sort of half sleep, like the postilions who sleep on horseback.

The dancers passed and repassed before him like phantoms in a dream; and as nothing is more easily saddened than a man who watches others laughing, melancholy, to which he was subject, did not fail to take possession of him.

"Sad joy," thought he; "miserable pleasures! An instant one thinks to steal from unhappiness! And who knows which of these five

people who are so gaily dancing before me is sure, as Marcel said, of having the wherewithal for to-morrow's dinner?"

As he made this reflection, Mademoiselle Pinson passed near him; he thought he saw her, while she was galoping, stealthily take a piece of cake which remained on the table and discreetly put it in her pocket.

CHAPTER V

DAYLIGHT was beginning to appear when the company separated. Eugène, before going in, strolled up and down for a time to breathe in the fresh morning air. Still following his sad thoughts, he repeated, in spite of himself, the grisette's song:

> "Just one dress, so debonair
> Just one bonnet."

"Is it possible?" he wondered. "Can misery be pushed to this point, show itself so openly and laugh at itself? Can one joke at not having any bread to eat?"

The piece of cake that had been carried off was no doubtful indication. Eugène could not help smiling, being at the same time moved to pity. "Nevertheless," he thought, "she took some cake and not some bread; it is possible it was out of greediness. Who knows? It is per-

haps to a neighbor's child that she is taking the cake—perhaps to a chattering porter, who will tell that she has spent the night out, a cerberus that must be appeased."

Heedless where his steps led him, Eugène had only by chance penetrated into the labyrinth of little streets which are behind Bucy Place, and in which hardly a carriage is to be seen.

At the moment he was about to retrace his steps, a woman enveloped in a shabby dressing-gown, her head bare, her hair in disorder, came out of an old house. She seemed so weak that she could hardly walk. She supported herself by the aid of the wall, and seemed to be anxious to reach a door near-by, where there was a letter box, in order to post a letter which she held in her hand. Surprised and alarmed, Eugène approached, and asked her where she was going, what she wanted, and if he could assist her. At the same time he stretched out his hand to support her, for she was ready to fall on the street. But without answering him, she recoiled with a sort of fear and pride. She placed her note on a milestone, pointed to the box, and appearing to gather all her strength, said, "There!" and that was all. Then, continuing to follow the wall, she reached the house once more. Eugène in vain attempted to make her take his arm and renewed his questions. She slowly entered the dark and narrow alley from which she had come.

Eugène picked up the letter; at first he took a few steps to post it, but soon stopped. This strange encounter had troubled him, and he felt himself struck with a kind of horror mingled with compassion so strong that, without taking time to reflect, he almost involuntarily broke the seal. It seemed odious to him, yet impossible not to seek, by whatever means he could, to fathom such a mystery.

This woman was evidently dying; was it from illness, or hunger? In any case, it must be from misery. Eugène opened the letter. On the outside was written, "To Monsieur le Baron de ——," and inside was what follows:

"Read this letter, monsieur, and, for pity's sake, do not refuse my prayer. You can save me, and you alone. Believe what I say; save me, and you will have done a good deed, which will bring you happiness. I have just been very ill, and have lost what little strength and courage I had. In August I return to the store; my effects are held at my last lodging, and I have almost the certainty of finding myself, before Saturday, absolutely without a home. I am so afraid of dying from hunger, that this morning I had resolved to throw myself into the water, for I have had nothing to eat for twenty-four hours. When I remembered you, a little hope entered my heart. Do not let me be mistaken!

Monsieur, I beg you on my knees; however little you may do for me will allow me to breathe a few days longer. I have a fear of death—and then, I am only twenty-three! I shall perhaps be able to wait till the first of the month, with a little help. If I knew words to excite your pity, I should say them, but nothing occurs to me. I can only weep at my impotence, for I fear you will do with my letter as one does when one receives such letters too often; you will tear it up without thinking that a poor girl is there, who is counting the hours and the minutes with the hope that you will have thought it too cruel to leave her thus in uncertainty.

"It is not the thought of giving a louis, which is so little to you, that will hold you back, I am sure; also, it seems to me that nothing is easier for you than to fold your alms in a piece of paper and to write on the outside: 'To Mademoiselle Bertin, Rue de l'Eperon.' Since working in the stores I have changed my name, for mine is that of my mother.

"I am going out. Give this to a commissionaire. I shall wait Wednesday and Thursday, and shall fervently pray for God to make you human.

"It occurs to me you may not believe in so much misery; but if you saw me, you would be convinced.

"ROUGETTE."

If Eugène had at first been touched on reading these lines, his astonishment redoubled, as one may well imagine, when he saw the signature. So it was that girl who had foolishly spent her money in pleasure parties, and thought of that ridiculous supper of which they had heard the story from Mademoiselle Pinson; it was she that misfortune reduced to such a prayer! So much improvidence and folly seemed to Eugène an incredible dream. But there was no doubt about it—the signature was there; and Mademoiselle Pinson, in the course of the evening, had also pronounced the assumed name of her friend Rougette, now Mademoiselle Bertin. How did she find herself suddenly abandoned, helpless, without bread, almost without shelter? What were her friends of the day before doing, while she herself was perhaps expiring in some attic in that house? And what was that house itself, where one could die in this way?

It was not the time to make conjectures; the most pressing need was to come to the help of hunger.

Eugène began by entering the shop of a restaurant keeper which had just opened, and by buying whatever he could find there. This done, he set out, followed by the waiter, for Rougette's lodging; but he felt embarrassed at unexpectedly presenting himself in this way. The air of pride that he had noticed in this poor girl made

him fear, if not a refusal, at least a movement of wounded vanity. How should he acknowledge he had read her letter?

"Do you know," said he to the waiter, "a young person who lives in this house, and who is called Mademoiselle Bertin?"

"O yes, monsieur!" answered the waiter. "It is we who habitually bring things to her. But if monsieur is going there, it is the wrong day. At this moment she is in the country."

"Who told you so?" demanded Eugène.

"Why, monsieur, the porters. Mademoiselle Rougette likes to dine well, but she is not very fond of paying. She has oftener ordered roast chicken and lobster than nothing at all; but to see her money, it is not once that one has to come back! And we know, in the quarter, when she is home and when she is not . . ."

"She has returned," resumed Eugène. "Go up to her room, leave what you are carrying, and if she owes you something, do not ask for anything to-day. It is my concern, and I will return. If she wishes to know who is sending her this, you will answer that it is the Baron de . . ."

With these words Eugène withdrew. On the way, he arranged as well as he could the seal of the letter and posted it. "After all," thought he, "Rougette will not refuse; and if she finds

the answer to her note has been rather prompt, she can argue the point with her baron."

CHAPTER VI

STUDENTS, no more than grisettes, are not rich every day. Eugène fully understood that, to give an appearance of truth to the little tale the waiter had to tell, he should have added, to what he had sent, the louis that Rougette was asking for; but there lay the difficulty. Louis are not exactly the currency of the Rue Saint-Jacques. Besides, Eugène had just agreed to pay the eating-house keeper, and unfortunately his drawer, at this moment, was hardly better lined than his pocket. That is why, without delay, he set out for the Place du Pantheon.

At this time there still lived in this Place that famous barber who went bankrupt and ruined himself in ruining others. Here, in the back shop, where money-lending went on in large or small amounts, there came every day the poor and careless student—in love, perhaps—to borrow at enormous interest a few pieces of gold gaily spent in the evening, and dearly paid for the next day. Here there furtively entered the grisette, with lowered head and shamed looks, to borrow for a trip to the country a faded hat, a dyed shawl, a chemise bought at the Mont-de-Piété. Here, young men of good family, need-

ing twenty-five louis, signed their names to letters of change for two or three thousand francs. Minors ate up their inheritance in advance; scatter-brained youths ruined their families and often destroyed their future. From the titled courtesan, whose head is turned by a bracelet, to the necessitous college-scout who covets a hare or a dish of lentils, all came here as to the sources of Pactolus, and the usurer-barber, proud of his clientèle and of his exploits even to boasting of them, supported the prison of Clichy while waiting to go there himself.

Such was the sad expedient to which Eugène, although with repugnance, was going to have resource to oblige Rougette, or at least to be able to do so; for it did not seem proven to him that the demand addressed to the baron would produce the desired effect. On the part of a student this was a great deal of charity, to tell the truth, to give his word for an unknown; but Eugène believed in God. All good actions seemed to him to be necessary.

The first face he perceived, on entering the barber's, was that of his friend Marcel, seated before a glass, a towel round his neck, and pretending to be having his hair attended to. The poor boy was coming to seek wherewith to pay for his supper of the night before; he seemed very preoccupied, and frowned with a very dissatisfied look, while the barber, pretending on

his side to pass through his hair an iron perfectly cold, was speaking to him in an undertone with his Gascon accent. Before another mirror, in a small room, was seated, also wrapped up in a towel, a stranger, very disturbed and ceaselessly looking from side to side and through the half-open door of the back shop; one perceived, in an old cheval glass, the somewhat thin reflection of a young girl, who, aided by the barber's lady, was trying on a dress of Scotch plaid.

"What are you doing here at this hour?" cried Marcel, whose face resumed its usual expression of good-humor as soon as he recognized his friend.

Eugène sat down near the dressing-glass, and in a few words explained the meeting he had had, and the design that brought him there.

"My faith," said Marcel, "you are very candid. What are you meddling with, since there is a baron? You have seen an interesting young girl who felt the need of taking some nourishment; you paid for a cold chicken. That is worthy of you; there is nothing to be said. You exact no gratitude from her; the *incognito* pleases you; it is heroic. But to go farther, is chivalry. To pledge one's watch or one's signature for a laundress protected by a baron, and whom one has not the honor of seeing every now and then, that has never been practised, in the memory of man, except in the blue library."

"Laugh at me if you like," said Eugène. "I know there are far more unfortunates in the world than I can relieve. Those I do not know, I am sorry for; but if I see one, I must help her. It is impossible for me, whatever I do, to remain indifferent in view of suffering. My charity does not extend to looking for the poor; I am not rich enough for that; but when I find them, I help them."

"In that case," resumed Marcel, "you have a great deal to do; they are not lacking in this country."

"No matter," said Eugène, still moved by the scene he had just been a witness of; "is it better to let people die and go on one's way? This unhappy girl is an idiot, a fool, whatever you like; but this compassion, I feel it. Is it better to act like her good friends, who already seem to trouble about her no more than if she were dead, and who yesterday assisted her in ruining herself? To whom can she turn? To a stranger who will light a cigar with her letter, or to Mademoiselle Pinson, I suppose, who sups in town and dances with all her heart, while her companion is dying of hunger? I must acknowledge, my dear Marcel, that all this really horrifies me. This little thoughtless girl of last night, with her songs and her quibbles, laughing and chatting at your house at the very moment that the other, the heroine of her story, is expiring in an attic,

urges me to indignation. To live thus as friends, almost as sisters, for days and weeks, doing the round of the theaters, the balls, and the cafés, and not to know next day if one is dead and the other living, is worse than the indifference of egotists; it is the insensibility of the brute. Your Mademoiselle Pinson is a monster, and the grisettes you praise so much have shameless habits, whose soulless friendships I know of nothing so despicable!"

The barber, who during this discourse had listened in silence, and continued to move his cold iron over Marcel's head, smiled malignantly when Eugène had finished. In turn garrulous as a magpie, or rather as the peruke-maker he was, when it was a question of idle talk, taciturn and laconic as a Spartan, as soon as business was mentioned he had adopted the prudent habit of always letting his customers speak first before taking his part in the conversation. The indignation expressed by Eugène in such violent terms made him, however, break the silence.

"You are severe, monsieur," said he, laughing, and speaking with his Gascon accent. "I have the honor of attending to mademoiselle's coiffure, and I think she is a very excellent person."

"Yes," said Eugène, "excellent, 'tis true, when it comes to drinking and smoking."

"Possibly," resumed the barber; "I do not

say no. Young people will laugh, sing, and smoke; but there are some who possess a heart."

"What are you hinting at, Father Cadédis?" demanded Marcel. "Not so much diplomacy; explain yourself frankly."

"I mean to say," answered the barber, pointing to the back shop, "that there is there, hung on a nail, a little black silk dress that you gentlemen no doubt know, if you are acquainted with the owner, for she is not in possession of a very complicated wardrobe. Mademoiselle Mimi sent me that dress at daylight this morning; and I presume that, if she has not come to the little Rougette's help, it is that she herself is not rolling in gold."

"Now that is very curious," said Marcel, rising and entering the back shop, regardless of the poor woman in the Scotch plaid. "Mimi's song must have lied, since she pledges her dress. But how can she visit now? She is not going out to-day, is she?"

Eugène had followed his friend.

The barber was not deceiving them. In a dusty corner, in the midst of other clothes of all kinds, humbly and sadly hung the only dress of Mademoiselle Pinson.

"That is it," said Marcel; "I recognize this dress as having seen it quite new eighteen months ago. It is the dressing-gown, the riding habit, and the parade uniform of Mademoiselle Mimi.

There should be on the left sleeve a little spot as big as a five-sous piece, caused by champagne. And how much did you lend on this, Father Cadédis?—for I suppose this dress has not been sold, and that we find it in this boudoir but as security."

"I lent four francs," answered the barber, "and I assure you, gentlemen, that it is pure charity. To any other, I should not have advanced more than forty sous; for the dress is devilishly worn; you can see through it; it is a magic lantern. But I know Mademoiselle Mimi will pay me for it; she is good for four francs."

"Poor Mimi!" said Marcel. "I will bet my hat that she has only borrowed this small sum to send it to Rougette."

"Or to pay some pressing debt," said Eugéne.

"No," said Marcel; "I know Mimi. I believe her incapable of despoiling herself to satisfy a creditor."

"That again is possible," said the barber. "I have known Mademoiselle Mimi in a better position than she is now in; she then had a great number of debts. Every day some one came and seized whatever she possessed, and they finished, in fact, by taking all her furniture, except her bed, for these gentlemen are no doubt aware that one can not take a debtor's bed. Now Mademoiselle Mimi at this time had four very good gowns. She wore all four, one above the other,

and slept with them so that they should not seize them; that is why I should be surprised if, having only one dress to-day, she pledged it to pay somebody."

"Poor Mimi!" repeated Marcel. "But, in truth, how can she manage? Has she then deceived her friends? Does she possess an unknown dress? Perhaps she feels ill after eating too much cake, and, in fact, if she is in bed, she does not need to dress. Anyhow, Father Cadédis, this dress hurts me, with its hanging sleeves which seem to cry for mercy. Here, take back four francs from the thirty-five louis you have just advanced me, and put this dress in a cloth, so that I can return it to this poor child. Well, Eugène," he continued, "what does your Christian charity say to this?"

"That you are right," answered Eugène, "to speak and act as you are doing, but that perhaps I am not wrong; I will make a bet, if you like."

"So be it," said Marcel; "let us wager a cigar, like the members of the Jockey Club. And you have no longer anything to do here. I have thirty-one louis; we are rich. Let us go at once to Mademoiselle Pinson's; I am curious to see her."

He put the dress under his arm, and they both left the store.

CHAPTER VII

"MADEMOISELLE has gone to mass," the portress replied to the two students when they had reached Mademoiselle Pinson's.

"To mass!" said Eugène, surprised.

"To mass!" repeated Marcel. "It is impossible; she has not gone out. Let us enter; we are old friends."

"I assure you, monsieur," answered the portress, "that she has gone to mass . . . about three-quarters of an hour ago."

"And to what church did she go?"

"To Saint Sulpice, as usual; she never misses a morning."

"Yes, yes, I know she prays to the good God; but it seems strange to me that she should have gone out to-day."

"Here she is, coming back, monsieur; she is just turning the corner; you can see her for yourself."

Mademoiselle Pinson, on leaving the church, was in fact coming home. Marcel had no sooner perceived her, than he ran to her, anxious to see how she was dressed. She wore, in place of a dress, a petticoat of dark calico, half hidden beneath a blue serge curtain out of which she had made, as well as she could, a shawl. From this

singular accoutrement but which, on the other hand, did not attract attention on account of its somber color, there issued a graceful head surmounted by her white bonnet, and her little feet clad in boots. She had enveloped herself in her curtain with so much art and precaution that it really resembled an old shawl, and one could hardly see the border. In a word, she found means still to please in this frippery, and to prove once more that a pretty woman is always pretty.

"How do I look?" said she to the two young men, pulling her curtain a little to one side, and allowing her slender figure to be seen squeezed in her corset. "It is a morning dishabille that Palmyre has just brought me."

"You are charming!" said Marcel. "My faith, I should never have believed one could look so nice in a window-curtain."

"Really?" resumed Mademoiselle Pinson; "but I look somewhat of a bundle."

"A bundle of roses," answered Marcel. "I almost regret to have brought back your dress."

"My dress? Where did you find it?"

"Where it was, apparently."

"And you rescued it from slavery?"

"My God, yes; I paid the ransom. Are you cross at my audacity?"

"No, no, on condition that you give me my revenge. I am very pleased to see my dress again; for, to tell you the truth, for a long time

now we have lived together, and I have become foolishly attached to it."

While speaking thus, Mademoiselle Pinson rapidly mounted the five flights of stairs that led to her room, which the two friends entered with her.

"But I can only return this dress," said Marcel, "on one condition."

"For shame!" said the grisette. "What foolishness! Conditions? I won't have them."

"I have made a bet," said Marcel; "you must tell us frankly why this dress was in pledge."

"Let me first put it on again," answered Mademoiselle Pinson; "I will tell you why afterward. But I warn you that if you do not wish to make an antechamber out of my cupboard, you must veil your faces like Agamemnon while I am dressing."

"That is nothing," said Marcel; "we are more honest than you think. I will not even glance at you."

"Wait," answered Mademoiselle Pinson; "I am full of confidence, but the wisdom of nations tells us that two precautions are better than one."

At the same time she disembarrassed herself of her curtain and delicately spread it over the heads of the two friends, in such a manner as to render them completely blind.

"Do not move," said she to them; "it will only take a moment."

"Take care," said Marcel. "If there is a hole in the curtain, I will answer for nothing. You will not take our word, in consequence it is redeemed."

"Happily my dress is also," said Mademoiselle Pinson; "and my figure, too," she added, laughing and throwing the curtain on the floor. "Poor little dress! it seems quite new to me. I take pleasure in feeling myself in it."

"And your secret, will you tell it to us now? Come, be sincere; we are not chatterboxes. Why and how could a young person like you, wise, sedate, virtuous, and modest, in this way hang on a nail, at a single blow, all her wardrobe?"

"Why? Why?" answered Mademoiselle Pinson, appearing to hesitate; then she took the two young men by the arm, and pushing them toward the door, said "Come with me and you will see."

As Marcel expected, she led them to the Rue de l'Éperon.

CHAPTER VIII

Marcel had won his bet. Mademoiselle Pinson's four francs and the piece of cake were on Rougette's table, with the remains of Eugène's chicken. The poor sick girl was a little better, but she was still in bed; and, whatever her gratitude toward her unknown benefactor, she sent

word to the gentlemen, by her friend, that she begged them to excuse her, and that she was not in a fit state to receive them.

"How like her that is!" said Marcel; "were she dying, on her mattress in a garret, she would still act the duchess before her water-jug."

The two friends, although with regret, were thus obliged to return home as they had come, not without laughing at that pride and discretion so strangely hidden in a garret.

After having attended the day's lectures at the School of Medicine, they dined together, and in the evening they went for a walk down the Boulevard Italien. There, while smoking the cigar he had won in the morning, Marcel remarked:

"With all this, are you not obliged to agree that I am right to love, at bottom, and even to esteem these poor creatures? Let us sensibly consider things from a philosophical point of view. This little Mimi, whom you slander so much, is she not doing, in despoiling herself of her dress, a deed much more praiseworthy, more meritorious—I even dare to say more Christian—than good King Robert in letting a poor devil cut the fringe off his mantle? Good King Robert, on the one side, had evidently a quantity of goods; on the other side, he was at table, history tells us, when a mendicant approached him, dragging himself on all-fours, and with some scissors

cut off the golden fringe from his king's dress. Madame the queen did not approve, and the worthy monarch, it is true, generously pardoned the fringe-cutter; but perhaps he had dined well. See what a distance between him and Mimi! Mimi, when she learned of Rougette's fortune, was assuredly fasting. Let us agree that the piece of cake she carried away from my rooms was destined in advance to compose her own repast. Now, what does she do? Instead of breakfasting, she goes to mass, and in this again she shows herself at least the equal of King Robert, who was very pious, I agree, but who wasted his time in singing in the choir while the Normans were raising the devil. King Robert abandons his fringe, and, in the main, he still has his mantle. Mimi sends her whole dress to Father Cadédis—an incomparable action, in that Mimi is a woman, young, pretty, a coquette, and poor; and take note that this dress was necessary for her to be able to go, according to custom, to her store to earn her daily bread. So not only does she deprive herself of the piece of cake she was about to swallow, but she voluntarily places herself in a position not to be able to dine. Besides, observe that Father Cadédis is far from being a mendicant, and dragging himself on all-fours beneath the table. King Robert, renouncing his fringe, makes no great sacrifice, since he found it all cut beforehand;

and we do not know if this fringe was cut sideways or not, and able to be mended; while Mimi, by her own movement, herself tears from off her poor body her dress, more precious, more useful than the clinking of all the fringemakers of Paris. She goes out clothed in a curtain; but you may be sure she would not go in this attire to any other place but the church. She would rather cut off an arm than allow herself to be seen, dressed in this manner, in the Luxembourg or the Tuileries; but she dares to show herself to God, because it is the hour at which she prays every day. Believe me, Eugène, in this single deed of crossing, in her curtain, the Place Saint Michel, the Rue de Tournon, and the Rue du Petit-Lion, where she knows every one, there is more courage, humility, and veritable religion than in all the good King Robert's hymns, of which every one talks, however, from the Great Bossuet to the insipid Anquetil, while Mimi might die unknown on her fifth floor, between a flower-pot and a hem."

"All the better for her," said Eugène.

"If I wished," said Marcel, "to continue comparisons, I could give you a parallel between Mucius Scævola and Rougette. Now, do you think it was more difficult for a Roman in the time of Tarquin to hold his arm for five minutes above a lighted chafing-dish, than for a grisette of these times to remain for twenty-four hours

without food? Neither the one nor the other cried out; but see from what motives: Mucius is in the midst of a camp, in the presence of an Etruscan king whom he has wished to assassinate; he missed his aim in a pitiful way, and is in the hands of the guards. What is he thinking of? Bravado? So that they may admire him before hanging him, he scorches his hand on a firebrand (for nothing proves that the brazier was very hot, nor that his hand fell in cinders). Thereupon the worthy Porsena, stupefied by his heroism, pardons and sends him home. You can wager that the said Porsena, capable of such a pardon, had a good figure, and that Scævola had no doubt that in sacrificing his arm he was saving his head. Rougette, on the contrary, patiently endures the most horrible and slowest torture, that of hunger; no one watches her. She is alone in the depths of an attic, and she had there to admire her neither Porsena, that is to say the baron, nor the Romans, that is to say the neighbors, nor the Etruscans, that is to say her creditors, nor even the brazier, for her stove is out. Now, why does she suffer without complaining? First of all, from vanity, that is certain, but monsieur is in the same category; then from the greatness of her soul, and there lies the glory; for if she remains dumb behind her window, it is precisely so that her friends shall not know that she is killing herself, so that one

can have no pity for her courage, so that her friend Pinson, whom she knows to be good and devoted, may not be obliged to give her her dress and her cake, as she has done. Mucius, in Rougette's place, would have made pretence of dying in silence, but it would have been in a square, or at the Gate of Flicoteaux. His taciturn and sublime pride would have been a delicate way of demanding the assistance of a glass of wine and a crust. Rougette, it is true, begged a louis from the baron, whom I persist in comparing with Porsena. But do you not see that the baron must evidently be in Rougette's debt for personal obligations? That is clear to the blindest. As you have already wisely remarked, it is possible that the baron may be in the country, and thenceforth Rougette is lost. And do not think to answer me here by that vain objection that one opposes to all the good actions of a woman, that is, that they know not what they do, and that they run after danger like cats on the gutters of a roof. Rougette knows what death is; she saw it from near on the bridge of Jena, for she has already thrown herself into the water once, and I asked her if she suffered. She said not; that she had felt nothing, except at the moment they fished her out, because the boatmen were pulling her by the legs, and had, from what she said, scraped her head against the edge of the boat."

"Enough!" said Eugène, "a truce to your awful jokes. Answer me seriously: do you think that such horrible trials repeated so often, always threatening, can at length bear fruit? These poor girls, abandoned to themselves, without support, without advice, have they enough good sense to profit by experience? Is there a demon attached to them, who gives them up for ever to misfortune and folly; or, in spite of so much extravagance, can they return to the right path? There is one who prays to God, you say; she goes to church, she fulfils her duties, she lives honestly by her work; her companions appear to esteem her; and you worthless fellows, you do not treat her yourselves with your usual levity. Here is another who passes incessantly from foolishness to misery, from prodigality to the horrors of hunger. Indeed, she must remember for a long time the cruel lessons she receives. Do you think that with good advice, regulated conduct, a little help, one can make out of such women reasonable beings? If it is so, tell me so; here is our opportunity. Let us go at once to poor Rougette's; doubtless she is still suffering, and her friend is watching by the bedside. Do not discourage me; let me act. I wish to attempt to lead them back to the right path, to speak to them sincerely; I do not wish to preach to or reproach them. I wish to draw near that bed, take their hands, and say to them . . . ."

At this moment the two friends were passing in front of the Café Tortoni. The silhouette of two young women, who were partaking of ice-cream near a window, was outlined by the brilliancy of the lights. One of them waved her handkerchief, and the other burst into laughter.

"Zounds!" said Marcel, "if you wish to speak to them, we need not go so far, for here they are, may God forgive me! I recognize Mimi by her dress, and Rougette by her white feather, always on the track of dainties. It seems that monsieur the baron has done things well."

CHAPTER IX

"And does not such folly appall you?" said Eugène.

"Yes, indeed," said Marcel; "but, I beg you, when you speak badly of grisettes, make an exception of the little Pinson. She told us a story at supper, she pledged her dress for four francs, and made a shawl for herself out of a curtain; and whoever says what he knows, whoever gives what he has, whoever does what he can, is not obliged to do more."

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

"Monsieur, my father has just failed in business" . . . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

"It would have been better for her not to have been born" 45

"I tell you she scents the Marquise a league away" 113

The Chevalier watched the Marquise write . . . 185

"Who are you?" 239

The Grisette 281

A 000 356 4